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ROCKY GROUND As a human rights lawyer and ultrarunner, Stephanie Case is no stranger to struggle, which is why she wants to empower girls and women living in dangerous countries through running

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Photograph: Asics / DTS Studio / Anne-Sophie Soudoplatoff
Runner: Makenna Myler
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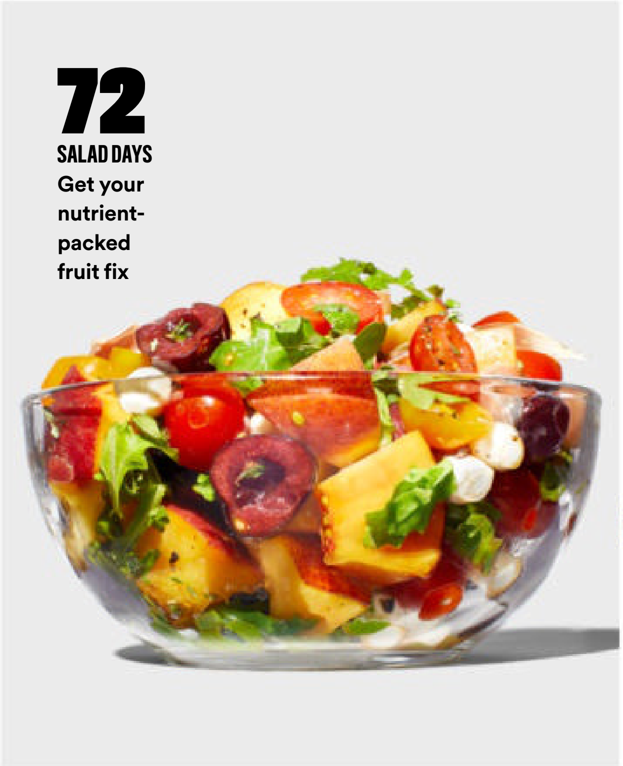

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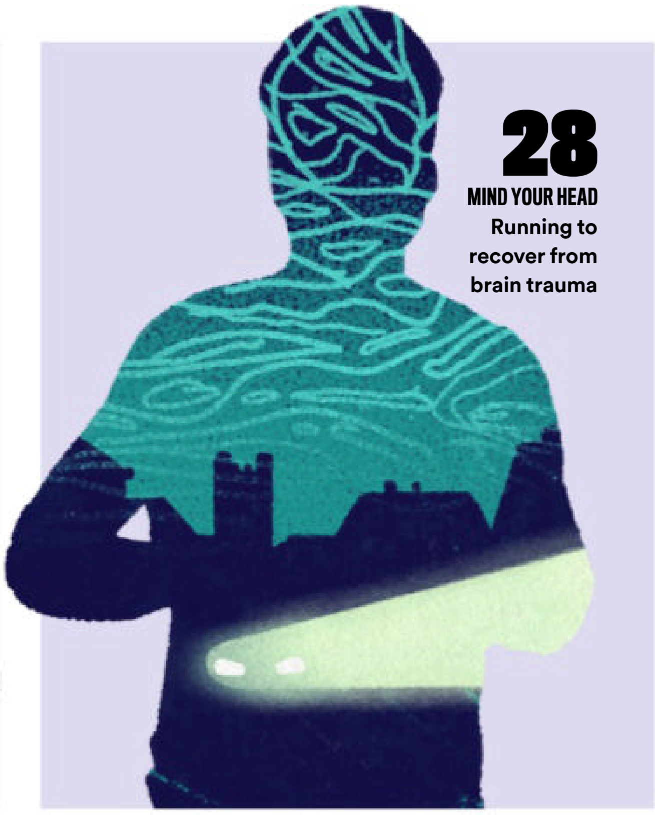

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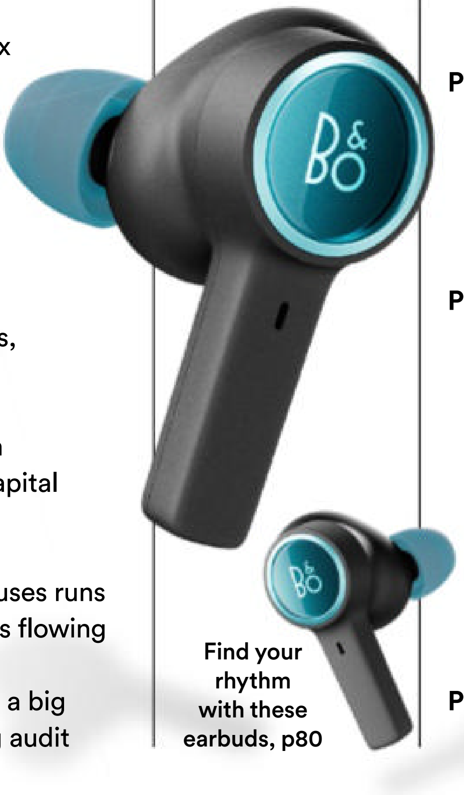

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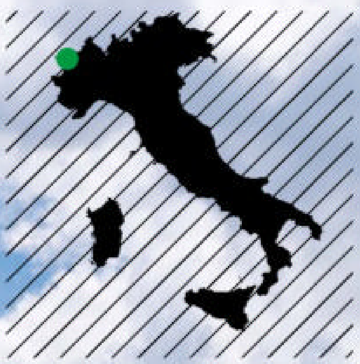

THE LOCATION

Home to the famous Tor des Géants mountain race, Italy's Aosta region is a trail runner's heaven. Sitting at the top of one of its valleys, the small town of Staffal is the perfect base for mountain adventures. Beneath the watchful gaze of the Monte Rosa massif, myriad trails take you up close and personal with glaciers and mountain lakes.

THE RUN

The Hour 7 team, set up to support ultra-distance athletes on and off the road, are pictured here on one of the higher trails above Staffal, where they based their 2022 summer training camp. Setting off from either the valley floor at 1,800m or taking the cable car up to save the legs some climb, you can enjoy the stunning trails in peace once the snow and the winter skiers have disappeared in spring. The options are virtually endless, with trails that could take you to different towns and valleys, even different countries.

RUNNERS

Front (from left): Rob Sinclair, Kirsteen Welch, Damo Carr.
Back (from left): Jo Murphy, Ollie Garrod, Samantha Amend

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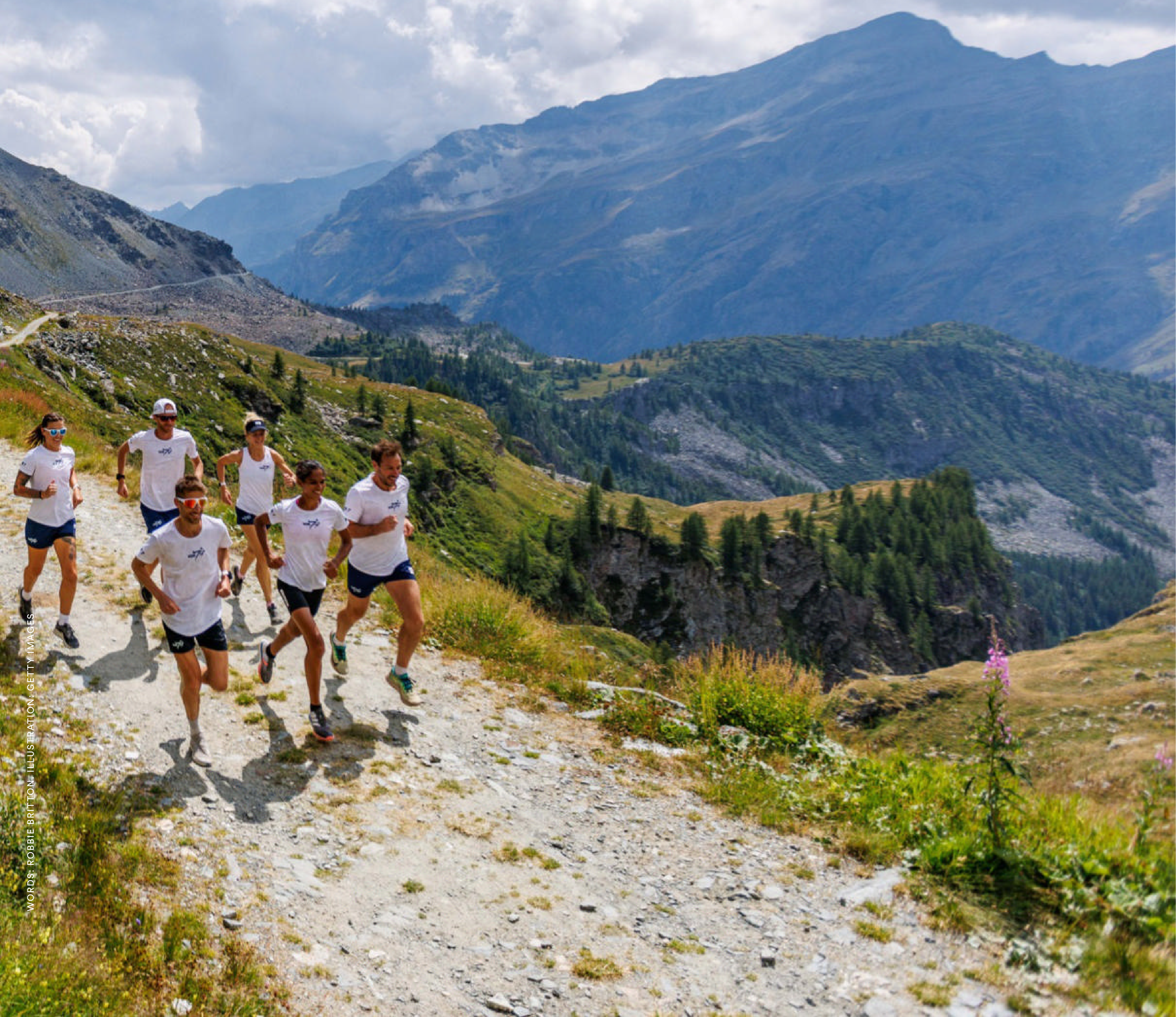

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EDITOR'S LETTER

THIS MONTH, I WANTED TO pay tribute to *RW* columnist Paul Tonkinson. For the past 13 years, Paul's monthly missive has been an entertaining part of the magazine, charting (in his own inimitable style) the ups and downs of his changing relationship with running – whether that involves the highs of achieving a sub-3:00 marathon or familiar runner's problems such as struggling with injury or a lack of motivation.

What's always made the column engaging is his knack for making his experiences relatable, even when he's describing something unique to him. As with his brilliant book, *26.2 Miles To Happiness*, his column has ostensibly been about running, but it's also been a chronicle of family life, career, pain, triumph, the struggle of woodchip wallpaper removal and the joy of red wine. He also recounts a visit to the hardcore detox Vivamayr Medical Health Resort in Austria, where he went hungry and was refused crackers with his broth, but on the plus side, he did manage to chop 25 seconds from his parkrun PB after returning home.

While he never takes himself too seriously, his passion for running has always shone through. So I'd like to say thank you to Paul for sharing his wit, woes and wisdom with us for all these years, and for reminding us what a gift running truly is.

ANDY DIXON
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF @RW_ed_Andy

PS: I'm thrilled to welcome Find A Race as *RW*'s new event marketplace partner – check out runnersworld.com/uk/events to choose from UK races of all types and distances, and start your next running adventure.

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LAUREN FLESHMAN
The elite athlete turned coach and author draws on her experience as a pro, plus her scientific background and years of research, to explain why the structures within our sport are at odds with female physiology, and how we go about *Unrigging The System* on **p36.**

ADRIAN MONTI
The runner and writer spoke to four people who have suffered serious brain injuries. Read the fascinating, inspiring accounts of how logging miles helps them with both their recovery and an acceptance of their new realities in *Changing Minds* on **p28.**

WARM-UPS

The TIPS YOU NEED *to* GET UP *to* SPEED

Strike a pose

New study confirms yoga's omm-azing benefits

COULD YOGA BE the one thing missing from your exercise regimen? Even if you stretch after every run, new research* suggests you'd still be better off hitting the yoga mat and breathing into position. The study found that adding yoga to a regular exercise plan is 'more effective than stretching exercises' for improving cardiovascular health. The researchers recruited 60 individuals with diagnosed high blood pressure for a three-month exercise programme. Half the group added 15 minutes of yoga to their five weekly workouts; the other half added 15 minutes of stretching. At the end of the trial, both groups had reduced blood pressure, but the yoga group enjoyed bigger reductions in their resting heart rate and 10-year cardiovascular risk.

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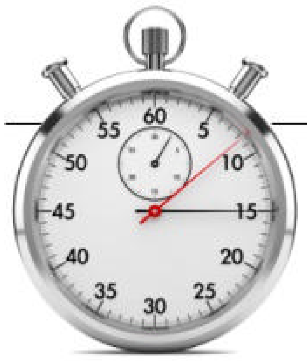


Running economy

Ageing runners, do you want the good news or the bad news? The good news: running economy improves with experience (hurrah!), so after your many years of service, you might be a more efficient mover. The bad news: it worsens with age. What can you do about this lamentable catch-22? Strength train. Studies have shown the benefits strength training has on running economy and bone strength. Now is the time to start adding weighted squats, lunges and calf raises into your routine, along with the classic core exercises such as planks and bridges.

40%

Researchers* found that just three to four one-minute bouts of vigorous exercise every day is linked with up to a 40% reduction in premature death.

Take it to the max

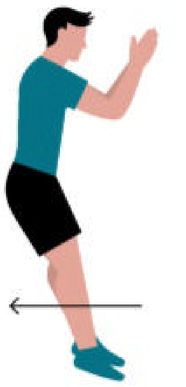
A new study reveals the best type of interval session to boost your VO_2 max

VO_2 MAX is considered to be the gold standard when it comes to assessing your aerobic fitness. It represents the maximum amount of oxygen your body can use during intense exercise. While some of your VO_2 max is dictated by your genes – thanks, Mum and Dad – runners can increase theirs through the right training. But what is the best form of training to boost your VO_2 max? That's what a recent study* set out to establish. It found that when participants completed 4×4 minutes of high-intensity exercise at 95% of their maximum heart rate – with three-minute active breaks between repeats – it was particularly beneficial. Runners who followed this type of training over an eight-week period enjoyed bigger bumps to VO_2 max and an improved 3K time-trial performance compared with those that followed sessions of either 8×20 seconds or 10×30 seconds of all-out running.

A NEW HIGH
Make use of intervals for VO_2 max gains

Hop to it

If you're curious about plyometrics but don't know where to start, try the Rudiment Hop Series, as recommended by fitness coach Jason Hettler. Aim for 20 contacts per double-leg movement (small jumps) and 10 on each leg per single-leg movement (small hops).



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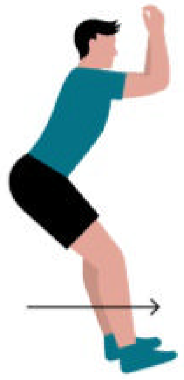

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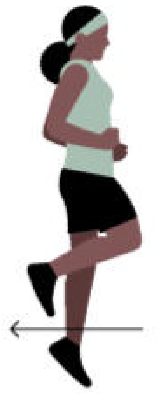

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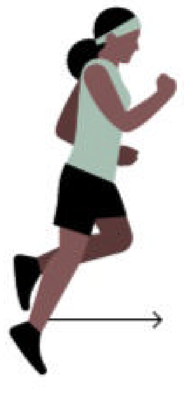

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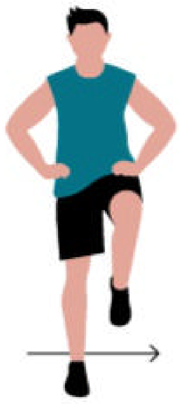
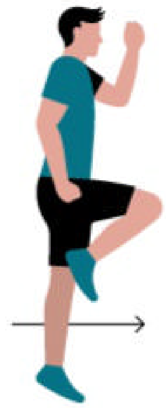


SIDEWAYS HOPPING



FORWARDS SKIPPING

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Four insights on sports nutrition offer food for thought

AT A RECENT CONFERENCE on endurance nutrition, leading dietitians and sports nutritionists from around the world chewed over the latest science and served up four interesting insights for runners.

01 / Dial up the carbs

Two days before running a marathon, increase your carb consumption to 10g to 12g per kilogram of body weight. That's a lot. For a 70kg runner, this amounts to 700g of carbs. So hit hard with high-carb meals (pasta, rice), snacks (dried fruit, bagels) and sports drinks. Then during the race, aim for 30g to 90g of carbs per hour.

02 / Beware the 'big salad'

Vegetables are wonderful, but if you're training really hard, your calorific needs are through the roof. And you can't meet them if your meals are too veg-heavy. As a rough guide, on an easy training day, fruit and vegetables should take up half the plate. On a hard training day, they should take up just a quarter. To be clear, vegetables are fantastic; they're just not calorie-dense enough to be your primary fuel during hard training periods.

03 / Cut back on fibre

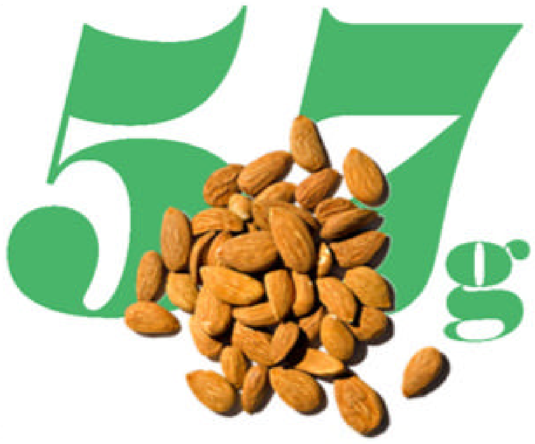
Employ a temporary low-residue diet on the day before a race – residue being the undigested fibre, bacteria and water that remains once you've digested the useful stuff. This is marginal gains territory, so you don't need to worry too much if the low-fibre approach feels more hassle than it's worth.

04 / Keep an eye on your iron

One challenge for runners is that heavy exercise creates increased levels of hepcidin, a hormone that disrupts iron absorption for up to six hours after you exercise. To avoid this, consider taking an iron supplement, ideally one containing vitamin C, to help with iron absorption.

To eat or not to eat?

Most of the literature around fasted running has focused on the impact of early morning outings after an overnight fast (sleep). But with most club sessions happening in the evenings, and a large percentage of runners preferring to run after work, what might fasting mean for your evening runs? A recent study* compared people who performed an endurance test at 6.30pm after seven hours of fasting (since an 11.30am lunch) or just two hours after a 540-calorie meal. The endurance test consisted of 30 minutes of steady cycling and a 15-minute all-out performance test. The result? The fasters burned more fat while exercising, but their abstinence from food reduced their 'voluntary performance and motivation'. Therefore, fasted evening runs might be good for fat loss, but poor for your enjoyment.



Eating 57g almonds (about 46 of the nuts) every day for four weeks boosts mood, retains strength and decreases muscle damage*.

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TAKE SOME YEARS OFF
Running is hard to beat

10 findings about healthy hearts

A new paper by cardiology experts offers some heart-healthy advice for runners of all ages and abilities*

01/ Highly active individuals – that includes you – can gain seven to eight years of life.

02/ You don't have to be a world-beating athlete. In fact, there's little extra heart benefit once you reach a good fitness level.

03/ When deciphering your maximum heart rate, the 220-minus-your-age method is so variable it has little value.

04/ In terms of calories burned, a mile running equals two miles walking or three miles cycling.

05/ Rating of perceived exertion works. Start with 'fairly light' to 'somewhat hard' if you're a total newbie, adding in 'hard' once you've gained fitness. But easy running should still make up the majority of your mileage, regardless.

06/ You don't have to exercise for a long period of time for it to benefit your heart. Short exercise snacks of one to two minutes are also effective.

07/ Exercise is great for diabetes prevention.

08/ The heart health benefits of HIIT are disputed.

09/ Resistance training 'should be recommended'.

10/ The benefits of regular exercise are 'underestimated by many clinicians and the public at large'.

Social movement

In fitness, as in life, you are who you surround yourself with. Therefore, it pays off to spend time with healthy people, as they will encourage you to be more active. One study* looked at how social interactions influence exercise trends and concluded that moderately active people could help sedentary people to embrace exercise. As you're reading this, the chances are you're fairly active. So, is there someone in your friendship circle who you could motivate?

191%

According to a new study*, those who were consistently inactive were 191% more likely to be hospitalised from Covid than those who were consistently active.

WORDS: RICK PEARSON. PHOTOGRAPHY: ARTHUR WOODCROFT. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES.

*SOURCES: *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PREVENTIVE CARDIOLOGY*; *PLOS*; *AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PREVENTIVE MEDICINE*

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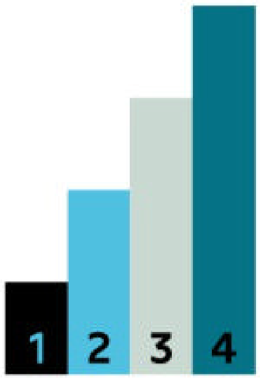
Easy does it

When you've just run a marathon – or any long-distance race – it pays to slowly ease back into training

WHETHER YOU'VE PBed in the race of your life or 'hit the wall' and had to walk it in, it can be tempting to finish a marathon and then quickly begin training for another serious long-distance challenge. But doing so is often a recipe for injury or burnout. Heed the words of running physio Tom Goom (running-physio.com) as he offers you five tips for returning to training sensibly.

HIT RESET
Take time out to let your body recover properly post-race



01/ Try a 'reverse taper' to restore training volume

In the final three weeks pre-marathon, we taper, reducing training to address fatigue. It takes roughly a month to recover post-race, so in the first week, run 25% of your target weekly distance, 50% in the second, 75% in the third, then 100% in the last.

02/ Begin with low-intensity running

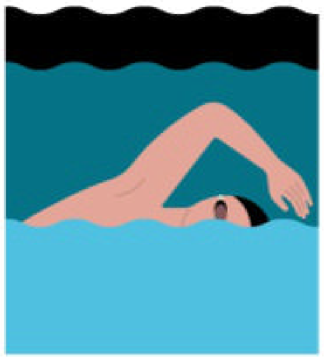
To avoid injury, start slow. In the first week post-race, keep all runs at an easy level – two to four out of 10 for effort. For week two, try a medium-intensity run (four to six for effort). Then, if you feel ready, attempt a faster session (six or above) in weeks three and four.

03/ Prioritise sleep

Recovery is important to allow your body to repair. The best way to do it? Sleep. Aim for seven to nine hours per night and consider a break from alcohol, as this can impair sleep and recovery. A good night's rest can also assist with mental recovery, which is often overlooked.

04/ Address any persistent niggles

We all have aches and pains after a race, but these usually settle down after a week or two. However, if the pain is persisting and affecting the quality of your day-to-day life, it's worth going to see a health professional for a full assessment and advice.



05/ Active recovery is preferable to a prolonged rest

A week in bed might sound appealing, but it can leave you stiff. Instead, try 'active recovery': low-intensity exercise to get your body moving. Often, cross-training – cycling, walking or swimming – is a good option, rather than running.

WORDS: RICK PEARSON. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES. ILLUSTRATIONS: ANDREA MANZATI

GET THE HYROX HIGH p20 + A FOND FAREWELL p27

HUMAN()RACE

NEWS, VIEWS, TRENDS *and* ORDINARY RUNNERS *doing* EXTRAORDINARY THINGS

‘I’VE BEEN TO HELL AND BACK’

Up-and-coming ultrarunner Jack Scott overcame his gambling problem to challenge for the top spot in some of the world’s toughest races

IT SOUNDS LIKE AN ANXIETY DREAM. It's a Wednesday evening in January, you've just finished running 268 miles over the icy hills of northern England and had a total of two hours and 20 minutes of sleep across three and a half days. Then someone says you need to be up early on Thursday to be coherent in front of Charlie Stayt and Naga Munchetty live on BBC Breakfast.

So it was for weary, moustachioed Jack Scott, who came a hard-fought second in this year's Spine Race, and the unfathomably chipper victor, Damian Hall. The TV appearance was a nice few minutes in the mainstream for the still under-covered sport of ultrarunning, which usually involves spectators watching numbered green dots move agonisingly slowly across a map on a phone screen. However, the interviewers' questions didn't go much deeper than some variation on, 'Are you both completely mad?'

Hall, an ultrarunning veteran at 47, and Scott, 28, a relative newcomer who already has a number of incredible feats to his name, both knew what they were getting into. In June, it'll only be six years since Scott, a steel construction worker from Stone, Staffordshire, ran his first race, knocking out a 90-minute half marathon and starting to think he might be decent at this. But he quickly moved on to the big miles. In 2018, he came second in his first 100-miler, the Exodus in the Brecon Beacons. In 2020, he beat a 32-year-old record set by Mike Hartley for running Scotland's Southern Upland Way, completing the 214-mile route in 55:45. And in 2021, he set a new winter FKT (fastest known time), covering more than 100 miles between the 26 lakes, meres and waters of the Lake District: 24:31:29.

'Even three years ago, if you'd told me I'd be running with Damian Hall in the Spine Race and we were both about to break the male record, I'd have said you were absolutely bonkers,' he says. In a beautiful finale, Hall and Scott finished simultaneously, Hall in 84:36:24, while Scott, burdened with a time penalty, ended up with 85:16:24. 'It was literally a dream come true.'

At the Spine, which journeys the full Pennine Way from Edale in the Peak District to Kirk Yetholm in the Scottish Borders, he could have won if it wasn't for a navigational error that cost him the extra time. Near a diversion, due to forest damage with which he was unfamiliar, he looked at the GPS on his phone upside down and turned left instead of right. At the next checkpoint, around three miles away, he let the race organisers know that he was aware of his mistake. They calculated the time he had gained and doubled it as a penalty.

Hall finally found Scott in the foothills of the Cheviots, and his rival effectively agreed to second place around there. 'Something was telling me, "You've got years in this sport. Hopefully, there will be many more opportunities like this. This isn't the moment to take another risk." And that was 100% the right decision.'

Knowing when to stop is a new skill for him. As recently as three years ago, he was tight in the clutches of a gambling addiction that had made him a regular in betting shops in his late teens, then obsessed with an online culture where it is far easier to lose control. 'I was earning good money, losing it and working my bollocks off to hide the fact that I was a gambling addict,' he admits. At one point, he was so immersed that he even took a punt on the Dutch election results.

'I WAS TRYING TO HIDE THE FACT I WAS AN ADDICT'

It's an oversimplification to suggest that running saved him from gambling. The two things overlapped for some time. In 2019, he won the 185-mile King Offa's Dyke Race, during which he made the decision to ask his girlfriend to marry him. 'The money for a ring was in the bank and I gambled not all of it, but enough to jeopardise it and set the proposal back a few weeks. The fog was finally gone after that.' He registered with the self-exclusion service Gamstop and the urge started to fade.

Yet it's easy to tell, from the way he talks about his life then compared with now, that running has offered a powerful new focus. 'They're both hard, but at opposite extremes. To my eyes, something like the Spine Race is pure and clear, full of possibilities. Gambling is murky, dingy and dangerous and full of absolute misery.'

Is there any sense in which his life experience has made him a better runner? 'I've been to hell and back and nothing good came of it for years and years,' he says. 'Now I've got an opportunity to make my own path with the same intensity, but there's hope and there's light. You can't be harmed by anything that's thrown at you. You're untouchable.'

Find Jack Scott on Instagram @trail.jack

A NEW PATH **Jack Scott fought hard for a way out of his gambling problem, eventually finding his way to second place in this year's Spine Race**

WORDS: DAVID SMYTH. PHOTOGRAPHY: @WILD_APERTURE; JAMIE RUTHERFORD

SOCIAL MOVEMENT

GET THE RUNNER'S HYROX

Test your strength and endurance with Hyrox, the greatest cross-training activity you've probably never heard of

A HYBRID RACE of running and strength has taken the world by storm since its launch in Germany in 2017. The brainchild of Olympic hockey player Moritz Fürste and event owner Christian Toetzke, Hyrox aims to bridge the gap between running and functional fitness by testing both strength and endurance.

The event combines 8km of running with eight workouts and can be raced as individuals or relay teams. As any runner knows, strength training is key to injury prevention and can benefit performance, particularly in longer distances.

Hyrox is a great anaerobic and aerobic workout because it combines shorter bursts of running with strength work over an extended period of time. While the elites finish in around an hour, there is no official cut-off time, meaning anyone can take part. 'What really appealed to me was the fact that they're very functional movements,' says Hyrox world champion Kris Rugloski. 'So any runner could just show up and they could complete it. It'd be very difficult, especially the sleds, but they could do it. It's not like you'd need years of training.'

During Hyrox races, competitors run eight 1km loops around a large indoor arena, interspersed with eight workouts: SkiErg, sled push, sled pull, burpee broad jumps, rowing, farmer's carry, sandbag lunges and wall balls. Every race is exactly the same, creating a global ranking system and PB benchmark. Taking part in any Hyrox event earns points towards qualification for the World Championship race, with the top 15 male and female times qualifying for the Elite 15 race.

As an ultrarunner racing in distances from 100 miles to 250 miles, Rugloski says training for Hyrox not only helps her to build strength, but it also fits perfectly with the race calendar.

'The Hyrox season is September to May, so I spend autumn through to spring doing a lot more Hyrox work and lower mileage, and then throughout the summer I do all my running. I feel like the seasons really complement each other.'

What started as one race in Germany with 650 competitors has now exploded to 90,000 participants during the current season (2022-23), with 41 races across 14 countries, including the UK.

Competitors tend to be a little on the older side, with 68% in the 30 to 60-year-old age range, and there's a good gender balance, with 46% being female.

The London race was held in Olympia London in April 2023 and more events will be held in Manchester and Birmingham.

There are now more than 600 affiliated gyms across 14 countries to enable amateurs and elites alike to train for the events, including 100 in the UK.

And Rugloski's advice for runners wanting to take part? Just hit the gym. 'As many as the movements are intuitive and functional, spend time on machines, the rower and the skier and do a lot of wall balls. This is also cardio, so it all naturally feeds into each other.'

Find your nearest Hyrox event at hyrox.com/find-my-race

THE PERFECT BALANCE
Hyrox mixes strength and cardio – events complement the race calendar, too

WORDS: LILY CANTER

Murphy's Lore

BY SAM MURPHY

RUNNERS CAN GET A LOT FROM WATCHING ATHLETICS

The Diamond League begins this month, heralding the start of the athletics track season. In our house, that means regular evenings glued to the red button (and with luck, an outing to a live fixture). It's such a pleasure to watch top runners compete, to get to know their stories and follow their fortunes over the season, but it's also a fantastic learning opportunity.

What drills do they do when they're warming up? Do they do static stretching before they run? Look how focused they are – some quashing start-line nerves, others whispering last-minute instructions to themselves. Most fascinating to me is observing how elite athletes run: what's their cadence like, their arm action, their body posture? There's so much to observe and mull over and discuss.

In my experience, however, few workaday runners show much interest in athletics – as if it's 'nothing to do with them'. I remember coaching a group the day Eliud Kipchoge ran the world's first sub-two-hour marathon in 2019 and I was bursting to talk about it – only to be met with blank faces and shrugging shoulders. This lack of engagement seems crazy to me, and I can't imagine it in any other sport. I'm confident that tennis players relish watching those at the top of their game at Wimbledon; that amateur golfers scrutinise performances at PGA tournaments to hone their own swing or putting skill.

Last year, there was a post on social media about Jake Wightman (a British athlete and 1500m world champion) getting a special mention at the parkrun he was attending. When the announcer mentioned his 1500m time of three minutes, 29.23 seconds, there was a smattering of applause – but when his parkrun time of 14:43 was mentioned, the crowd went crazy. This ability to recognise achievement only in terms that relate to one's own experience (5K as opposed to 1500m) speaks to this disconnect between athletics and running.

THE TAKEAWAY...

Never watched athletics live? Night of the 10,000m PBs takes place on 20 May at Parliament Hill Athletics Track in London. Celebrating 10 years this year, this unique event is a true celebration of 10,000m running – a chance to watch elite-level performances up close and personal rather than from distant stands. The carnival atmosphere is boosted by music, entertainment and two beer tents that span the track's home and back straights, so the athletes pass through them on each lap.

Does it matter? I think so. I'd like to see athletics stadiums as packed with spectators as football stadiums are. I'd like to hear more runners talking about who'll fare best in the next showdown between Wightman and Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen (the 5000m 2022 world champion and reigning 1500m Olympic gold medallist) or whether Sifan Hassan will return to form this season.

If you're of the opinion that athletes are a 'different breed' from the rest of us – simply gifted – an evening of athletics will soon show you that they're just as human as you and me. You'll see runners trip over the kerb on the inside lane, or mistakenly think they've finished and raise their hands in victory only to find they still have a lap to go. And if you're wanting motivation, just watch Laura Muir on the home straight, and you'll see etched on her face the effort, pain and passion that goes into every performance.

The other reason to fall in love with athletics is because it extends the size of the family that you, as a runner, belong to. It matters not that the men's world record 10,000m time [26:11, held by Joshua Cheptegei] isn't far off many of our 5K times. We're all logging the miles, battling injuries and doing our best to stay motivated. We're all chasing hopes and dreams. We're all putting one foot in front of the other; some of us in straight lines, others in circles.

sam-murphy.co.uk

ILLUSTRATION: PIETARI POSTI

Your World

LETTER OF THE MONTH

BACK TO IT Yasmin's fall has motivated her even more

COMEBACK TRAIL

Having just read the Murphy's Lore column in the May 2023 issue, I wanted to thank Sam for her insight and tips for returning to running after a period where your body won't let you. In February 2022, I had a ski accident that caused a huge amount of damage to my knee and resulted in the need for surgery in September. Of course, I was unable to run for nearly all of 2022, but I continued to read *Runner's World* when it landed on the doormat as a reminder of what I was working towards. I always love reading all the inspiring stories of other runners nationwide and I certainly needed the motivation to continue the laborious grind of rehabilitation. After a year of not being allowed to run, I cannot wait to lace up and get out in the fresh air for a run – I don't think I'll be able to think of a good excuse to miss a run ever again!

Yasmin Blackshaw

RW Glad to hear *RW* has played a small role in your recovery journey. Pretty soon, you'll be able to put these new Saucony shoes through their paces.

WIN!

What's inspired, impressed or annoyed you lately about running or runners? The writer of the winning email or letter receives a pair of Saucony Triumph 20s, worth £155 (available in a colour of your choosing, if in stock).

RUNNER'S WORLD, House of Hearst,
30 Panton Street, London SW1Y 4AJ
Email letters@runnersworld.co.uk
Twitter and Facebook @runnersworlduk

WHAT THE GEL

I missed out on the latest Ashby 20 run due to illness, but was back in training mode a week later, running a portion of the route on my long run. What's annoyed and disappointed me more than ever was the incredible amount of energy gel wrappers that were discarded into the hedgerows and grass verges along the route. I collected a staggering 55 wrappers from the side of the road within a half-mile run, before putting them in the village bin. Yes, you may have sticky fingers for a while, but please can we all try to be more considerate in disposing our energy gel wrappers and leave our running routes as we'd want to find them?

Craig Wilson

NEW BALLS, PLEASE

I was inspired by your article in the May issue on Gary McKee running a marathon every day for Macmillan Cancer Support – an amazing feat of endurance. As a fellow charity runner (MND Association) and rugby league fan, I can't help but nitpick at your choice of rugby ball in Gary's article. It's a rugby union ball, so here's a rugby league ball for your reference.

Graham Berry

RW Sorry, Graham! We'll try harder next time.

parkrun
Rheinpark

POWER PAIR Running has surprised Peter

FATHER AND SON

There was a time when I *hated* running. In the armed forces, I *had* to run; the army backpack, boots, gun and bellowing sergeant didn't really endear me to the activity. Some time after leaving the forces, my son invited me to do a 5K run with him. I didn't realise how unfit I was, but I soon became addicted. The 5Ks led to 10Ks; halfs led to ultras. Simon and I entered a 24-hour run as a pair at the Belvoir Castle Equinox event – and to our surprise, we came second, completing 100km each (not bad for a seventysomething).

Peter Daniel

INSPIRED BY TANSER

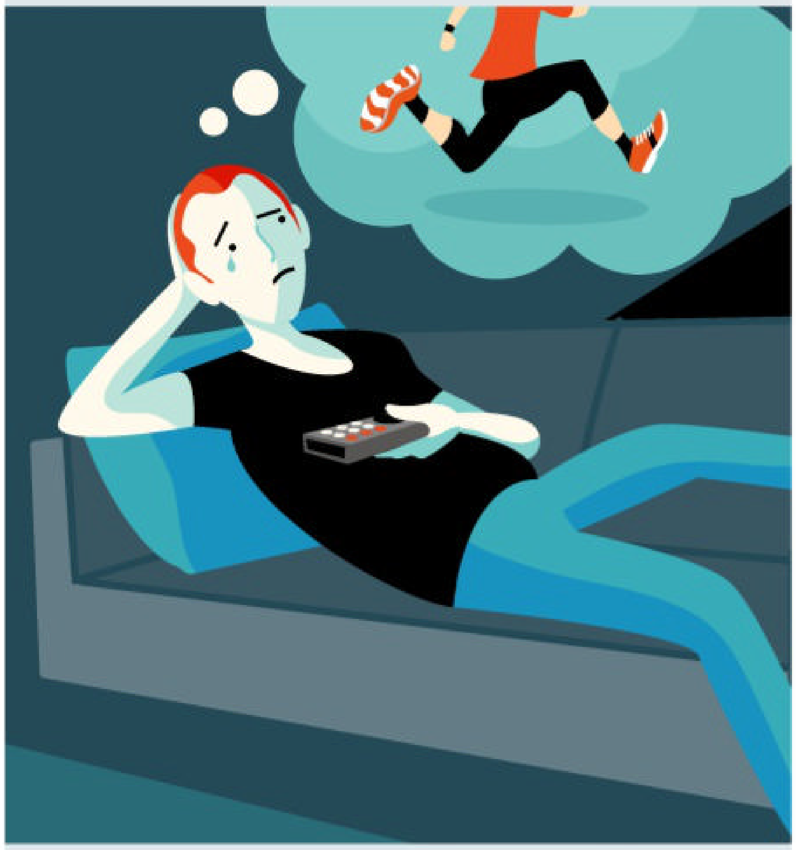
What a truly amazing man Toby Tanser is. Most people, after being attacked in a foreign country, wouldn't then continue to raise money for a place where such a traumatic experience occurred. This shows what an inspiring man Tanser is. I will definitely be buying his book, *Running With Destiny,* after reading a section of it in *Runner's World,* so thank you for bringing this to my attention.

Charlotte Wildman

WORDS: RICK PEARSON. ILLUSTRATION: PIETARI POSTI

WE ASK, YOU ANSWER

WHAT DO YOU MISS MOST ABOUT RUNNING WHEN YOU CAN'T DO IT?



'My sanity' *Mark Goodro*

'Being able to switch off my brain' *Julie Erskine*

'Endorphins. No form of cross-training can hit the same feeling' *Chris Tompkins*

'Escaping the business of everyday. Oh, and the mud!' *Sarah Wright*

'The ability to eat everything and not put on weight' *Mike Gascoigne*

'The speed! Being able to run and catch the wind in my hair is such a boost' *Lisa Harriet*

'That feeling of escaping everything' *Kelly Bielamowicz Blissett*

'Peace and quiet' *Liz Scott*

'Being unavailable!' *Rialine Steyn*

'Freedom, fresh air, headspace and that glass of wine as a reward' *Anne Kennedy*

SNAP CHAT

#GROUPSHOT

SHOW US A PIC WITH YOU AND YOUR FAVOURITE RUNNING BUDDIES

NEXT MONTH: #MYSINGLETFRIEND SHOW US A PIC OF YOUR BEST RUNNING VEST LETTERS@RUNNERSWORLD.CO.UK

'The Tiptree Road Runners family' ***Hannah Bowley***

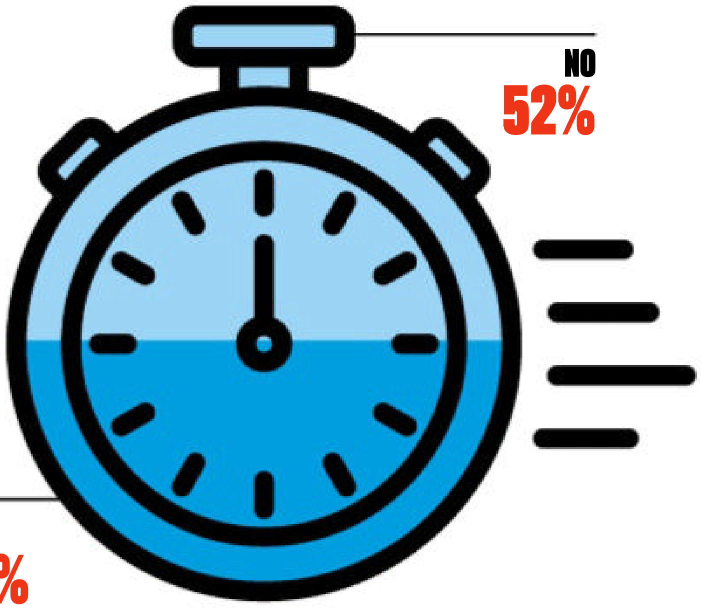
'My husband, although he takes it more seriously than I do' ***Anne Marie***

'Worksop Witches – Halloween half marathon' ***Liza Silverwood***

'Me (far left) and my running buddies at the Cheltenham Half' ***Rebecca Wood***

POLL

DO YOU THINK MARATHONS SHOULD HAVE CUT-OFF TIMES?



***Based on a RW poll of 1,104 votes**

BY THE NUMBERS

TEAM RW

COMPLETED A RELAY OF THE CAPITAL RING IN UNDER 12 HOURS

TOO BAD FOR BADWATER, TOO TOUGH FOR TOUGH MUDDER, Team *RW* had been looking for a true running challenge. In such moments, it can be tempting to cast one's gaze to the far corners of the world, believing that adventure only exists in vast deserts or snow-capped peaks. But this is not the case. Adventure, like a draught excluder, can be found on your doorstep.

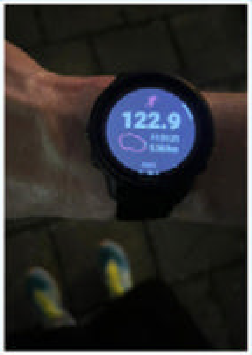
In our case, that doorstep is London – not a landscape renowned for its endurance-running potential. But it exists, nonetheless, and no more so than on the Capital Ring, a 15-stage circumference of London designed to celebrate the city's many green spaces.

The 78-mile route is best known among walkers. But it begs to be run, so that's exactly what we did. Here are the need-to-know stats from our epic adventure.

7

NUMBER OF *RW* TEAM MEMBERS: ANDY, JOE, JEN, RICK, BEN, KATE AND ALICE

RUNNER'S WORLD



11:31:21

THE TIME IT TOOK US TO RUN THE RING. THINK YOU CAN BEAT IT?

15

Number of sections in the Capital Ring. Check out maps for each at innerlondonramblers.org.uk

78

The Ring's distance in miles. The longer route, the London Loop, is 150 miles and a great 24-hour relay

9:04 MIN/MILING

The *RW* team's average pace

3,900FT

The overall elevation – roughly the equivalent of climbing up Snowdon

1854

THE YEAR IN WHICH THE CRYSTAL PALACE PARK DINOSAURS WERE UNVEILED TO THE PUBLIC. THEY'RE STILL THERE TODAY AND CAN BE SEEN ON SECTION FOUR OF THE ROUTE

407FT

Elevation of Oxleas Meadow, the highest point on the route

SEVEN

DOWNING
STREET SW1
CITY OF WESTMINSTER

Number of Prime Ministers who attended Harrow, whose grounds you pass through on section nine

2005

THE YEAR IN WHICH THE CAPITAL RING WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED

10:14:57

The fastest individual time for the Capital Ring, held by 2:23-marathon man Richard McDowell

WORDS: RICK PEARSON. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

The Flamingo Diaries

BY LISA JACKSON

RUNNING FREES YOUR MIND TO BECOME MORE CREATIVE

Most people I know say music is the soundtrack of their life. They listened to their parents' music as children, then forged their own musical identities in rebellion, used music as a plaster for break-ups, make-ups and life's many disappointments and triumphs. Not me. My mum and dad occasionally listened to classical music or Elvis, but we lived in a quiet house and they were keener to pass on their love of running and reading. And when I became a runner, chatting to fellow race participants was the backing track to my marathons, not a pre-prepared playlist. 'If you ever spot me wearing headphones', I once told a running buddy, 'you should know that my race is going incredibly badly! I only use them in the direst of emergencies.'

My life does, however, have a soundtrack in the form of John Irving's books. The first book to captivate me was *The World According To Garp*. The story of a fatherless misfit child finding his place in the world through writing mirrored my own teenage experience as a super-swot with few friends but literary heroes.

Many life experiences later, *A Prayer For Owen Meany* became incredibly meaningful when my husband Graham was told he had terminal cancer. It tells the story of an outsider, the pint-sized Owen Meany, who talks in an unnaturally high-pitched voice. He learns Vietnamese and obsessively practises basketball, not realising that these skills will one day enable him to heroically save a group of Vietnamese war orphans from a grenade attack. When Graham was diagnosed I realised that, like Owen, everything I'd learned over the past 50 years – the courage that running over 100 marathons and ultras instilled in me, and the tools I'd acquired as a hypnotherapist and hypnobirthing teacher – had equipped me to be a resilient and resourceful 'cancer thriver's wife', a role I felt privileged to have. And then there was *A Widow For One Year,* a searing portrait of grief. Here, too, I found many parallels with my own life after losing my husband.

It came as a happy surprise, then, to discover that John Irving was a fellow runner (after knee surgeries and hitting 80 he's since had to stop), which explains his extraordinary creativity. He mulls over his novels for up to 20 years and, if he's like me, I suspect a good deal of that took place on the road. Because not only is running a physical act of creation – it places stress on your bones and muscles that stimulates their growth, and frees your mind to become more creative – it also lets me uncouple myself from the demands of my inbox and opens up time for my thoughts to wander. And, more often than not, I'm delighted to find the perfect word or metaphor for my new running book pop straight into my head like a genie summoned from Aladdin's lamp.

St Augustine wrote, 'It is solved by walking,' but I'm sure if cushioned trainers had been around back then, he may have added the words 'or running'. Next time you go out for a run, lose the headphones and instead choose an interesting subject you'd like to explore. I guarantee that when you get back, you'll not only have healthier bones, stronger muscles and hundreds of very satisfying beads of sweat, you'll have created something less tangible but nonetheless just as valuable: brilliant ideas.

WORDS TO GIVE YOU WINGS

'The moment my legs begin to move, my thoughts begin to flow.'

The words of prolific American philosopher and naturalist Henry David Thoreau prove that the great man was well acquainted with the magical power of moving your body.

Lisa is the author of two bestselling running books, *Running Made Easy* and *Your Pace Or Mine?* Her latest travel books contain chapters about running and have been released as audiobooks

ILLUSTRATION: PIETARI POSTI

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Tonky Talk

BY PAUL TONKINSON

I'VE HAD A GOOD RUN, NOW IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON

Tonky Was Here.

It's time to have a relationship audit with my running. Current status: complicated. As a youth, I loved running and running loved me. I ran constantly, often twice a day. I recorded every run, looked for patterns, set goals and schedules, then kept to them. Time was everything in the quest for PBs. Looking back, maybe there were some toxic elements. It was certainly a relationship that brooked no compromise. On race days, I would trash myself like a pain junkie. I remember the shortness of breath, the clamping chest and the screaming muscles. I'd hurl myself down the finishing straights then bend double, gasping for air as life reassembled itself around me.

It was the best of times. I got the PBs, but, more than that, I experienced those brief moments of ecstasy where you feel like you can run forever. It's not really you running, something else is running through you, as you hurtle through the woods in the lead pack at a cross-country race. A giddy rush that has informed the rest of my life. The search for that flow and power.

Throughout my twenties and thirties, running was an occasional fling. I'd dip into it when I wanted a contrast to the hedonistic roller coaster I was strapped on to. Within a few weeks, I could give you a five-minute mile. It felt like running was just waiting for me to return to it when I fancied.

Then in my forties it dragged me back in. Occasionally at first, to correct a hangover, I'd find myself in the woods for an hour. Then came the column and the podcast and before you know it, you're back in another marriage. Join a club, don the vest, line up. Three runs a week became five, six, seven. The mileage grew from 25 to 35, topping out at 60 to 70. And improvement followed.

Running had a different purpose – transcendence, self-discovery, joy and hardship. I was a competitive beast again. Tuesday track, Sunday long runs. Life refashioned itself around running as its beating heart. I was working something out, shredding some inner obstacle, and the achievement of a sub-three-hour marathon dissolved it completely. Sounds grandiose, but it's true.

Since then, injuries have taken their toll, the wear and tear over the years. It's a paradox – I want to run longer, but when I up my training, I pick up a niggle. I love running more than ever but it no longer feels like an essential part of my identity. It's something I do to give me time to think, a portal, if you'll excuse the pretentiousness, to creativity and a window of peace. The simplest way I can put it is that I used to look out of the window on a train journey, see a field and imagine myself running through it. And now I don't, so I have to be true to that feeling.

In that spirit I feel that, with a heavy heart and a painful lower back, this should be my last column. It's only gracious to bow out and let someone else enjoy the great privilege of a monthly missive in *RW*. I can't tell you how much it has given me an incredible feeling of connection, and it's documented a huge part of my life these past 13 years.

I can only finish by wishing you good luck in your running endeavours. I'll always run, of course. You'll find me doing local parkruns, cheering on my kids or most often in the woods, happy as a young pup chasing a squirrel. See you out there.

Paul is a stand-up comedian and co-host of the *Running Commentary* podcast

TONKY'S TOP TAKES

...on the taping of nipples (2010)

'This is a ritual that I only ever do on marathon day and I enjoy it immensely. One year I didn't do it – by the end it looked like I'd been shot. Twice. I love the gladiatorial, earthy element to the marathon: Vaseline the genitals, tape the nipples, void the bowels. It's physical.'

....on mid-race encouragement (2012)

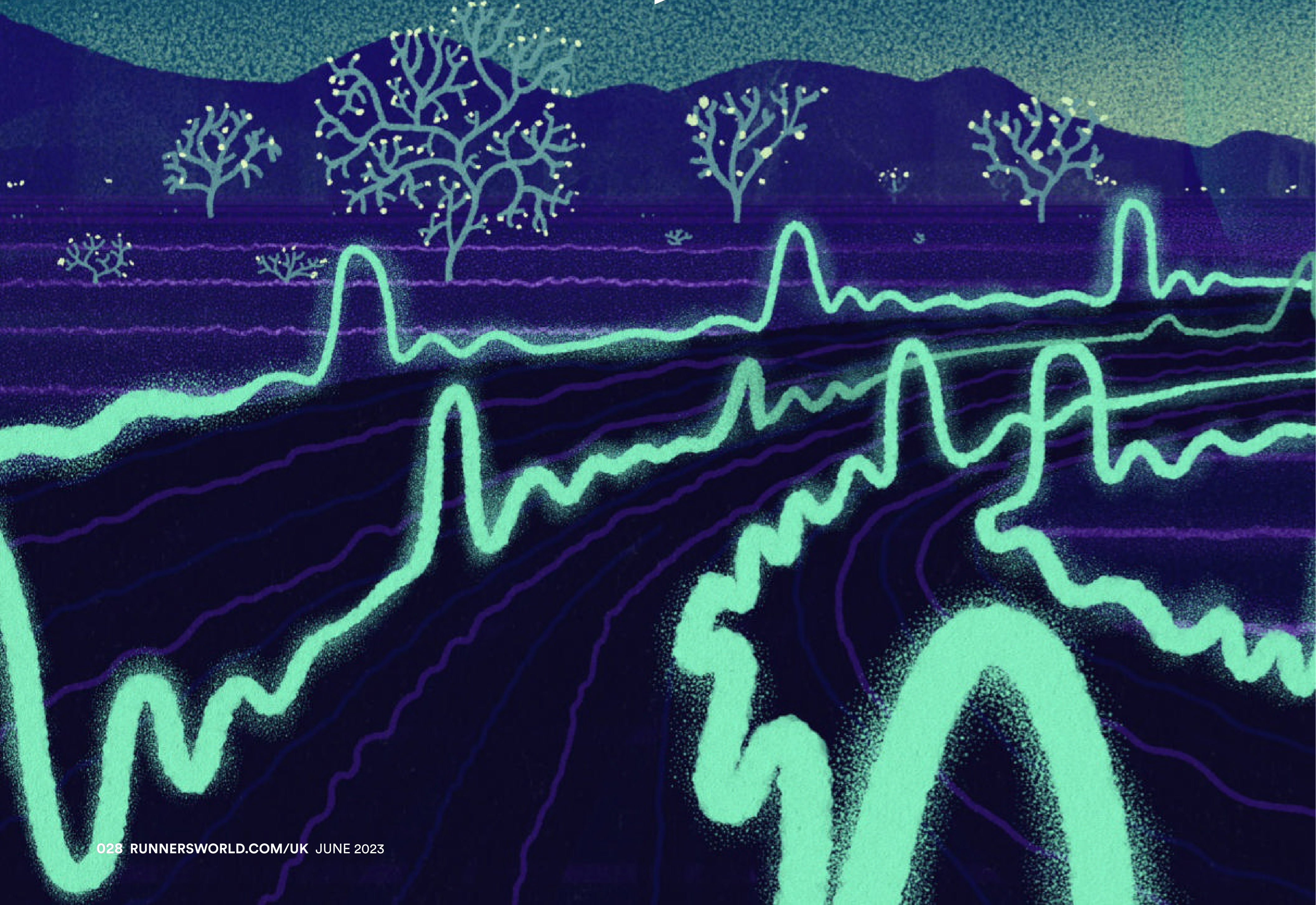
'Maybe we should be issued with special vests singling out those too vulnerable to be egged on. Or a sign that says, "Please do not encourage – anything you say will annoy.'

ILLUSTRATION: PIETARI POSTI

Changing minds

INJURIES THAT CAUSE BRAIN TRAUMA CAN HAVE DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES, BUT FOR SOME, RUNNING OFFERS A WAY FORWARD

WORDS: ADRIAN MONTI **ILLUSTRATIONS:** MARCIN WOLSKI



Running can be an
important step on
the road to recovery

We runners live in fear of injuries.

We know we're always one step away from a twisted ankle or pulled hamstring that could sideline us for days, weeks or months, scuppering our best-laid training plans or race-day goals. But running's pains, strains and sprains are trivial compared with often life-changing brain injuries. A trauma can result from something like a fall or a car accident, causing your brain to bump against the inside of your skull. Equally devastating are acquired brain injuries, caused by issues such as a stroke (when blood supply to part of the brain is cut off), haemorrhage or tumour.

Sadly, brain injuries are far too common. Recent UK data recorded more than 356,000 hospital admissions annually for brain injuries – roughly one person every 90 seconds. Today, around 1.4 million people in the UK live with the aftermath of this trauma. The severity of these injuries varies greatly. At the lower end of the scale are cases of mild concussion due to a force rapidly moving the brain back and forth. According to the charity Headway, an estimated 95% of all head injuries fit into this category. However, even mild concussion can have serious consequences, as a recent major study led by Oxford and Exeter University researchers involving 15,000 participants found. It concluded that suffering three or more concussions is linked to worsening brain function later in life. Even a single moderate-to-severe instance could have a long-term impact on memory, the study found.

When someone loses consciousness or is put into a coma, the consequences can be even more far-reaching, with long-term side effects including poor balance or loss of mobility, some of which may be permanent. Common cognitive problems include memory loss, difficulty concentrating, disturbed sleep and slowness at taking on board new information. Some people will suffer unsettling personality changes; mood swings might mean they change from being fairly even-keeled to someone racked with anger, frustration, depression or anxiety.

Recovery time from brain injuries varies greatly, but neurological experts agree that targeted rehabilitation where the brain learns new ways to overcome any lasting damage is crucial. And new research published in *Experimental Neurology* last year suggests that exercising, rather than a strict rest regime, might benefit recovery more. After looking at many other studies, researchers concluded that 'exercise can facilitate cognitive recovery through multiple mechanisms'. In addition to reducing inflammation, exercise increases neuroplasticity. This describes how the brain adapts to changes, including those that may have been caused by a brain injury. It's essential for the creation of new connections to other parts of the brain, which allows people to continue performing tasks they once took for granted. Although the best time to start exercising following a traumatic brain injury varies from case to case, these latest findings offer fresh hope to those on what is often a long road back.

Of course, depending on the type of lasting damage caused, running isn't suitable for everyone who suffers a brain injury and anyone considering it should seek medical guidance. But for those who get the go-ahead – including the four runners who share their inspirational stories here – running can play a major role in boosting recovery and adapting to the new reality of life after brain trauma.

Dudley was close to ending his life after his accident

'Getting those running shoes saved my life'

DUDLEY GARNER, 40, FROM NORWICH

'Back in March 2009, I'd been out with my girlfriend Cat (now my wife), celebrating her moving in with me. After some drinks, we left a bar to head home. We took a few steps, stopped so I could walk on the outside, closer to the road, and shared a brief kiss. The next second a car mounted the pavement, hitting us both from behind.

Cat suffered less serious injuries, but I had a fractured skull, smashed eye socket and a hairline spinal fracture. I drifted in and out of a coma for three days and when I came round, I didn't have a clue what was going on.

After discharging myself, I came under the care of the Colman Centre, which has a neurological rehab unit. I'd been a financial adviser (I was later retired by my employers), who played football, golf and tennis. All of that disappeared in an instant and, aged 27, I felt my life had been devastated.

My coordination went to pot, so I was now rubbish at the sports I'd previously enjoyed and I constantly got my words muddled. A neurologist said the accident was like the contents of a filing cabinet being tipped over the floor, leaving everything in a huge mess.

Two years after the injury, my brain had probably recovered as much as it would. Around that time, despite getting married and having our first child, I went off the rails. I was drinking heavily while coping with depression and anxiety. I was very angry accepting I had permanent brain damage that had transformed me into a different person. I felt like a nuisance, a waste of space – and at my lowest point, I wanted to end my own life.

Cat could see I was struggling and came up with a way to help me. In February 2013, she bought me a pair of trainers and signed me up for the Edinburgh 10K to fundraise for Headway. At first, I wasn't pleased, but later realised getting those running shoes saved my life. My very first short training run didn't go well – I threw up before collapsing in the garden. I then followed a *Runner's World* training plan for my first ever race.

I'd planned to end my life while still up in Edinburgh, but my mother-in-law became unwell, so I was needed. While at the hospital with family, I started reading my phone messages saying how well I'd done and the money I'd raised. I got a tingly feeling down my back and suddenly realised that this running malarkey was actually alright after all. I signed up for the Great North Run there and then, only a few hours after planning to kill myself.

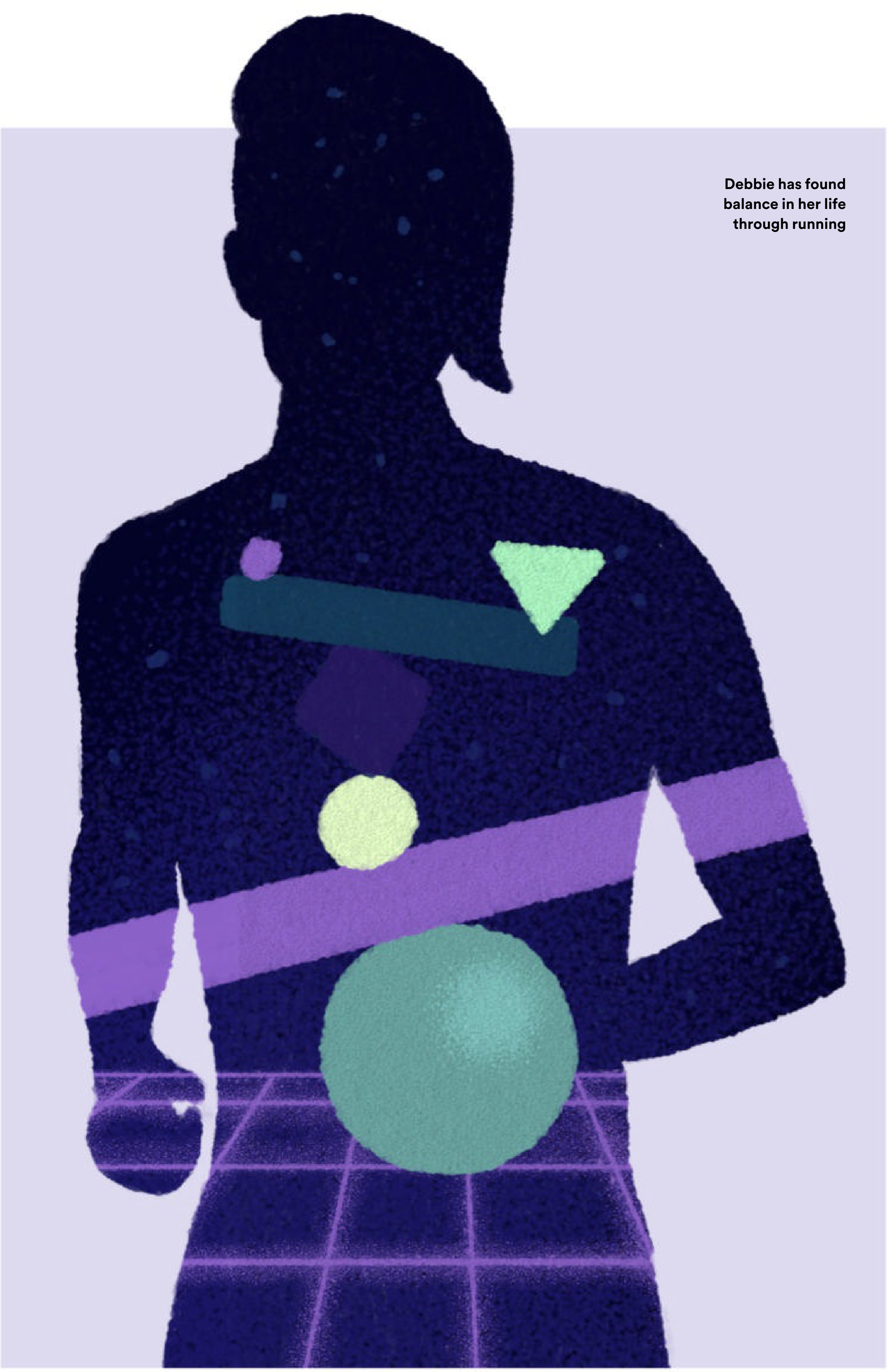
From then on, running changed my life. I put on a Couch to 5K programme in the park for anyone wanting to take part. I'm now a qualified running coach for three community groups and a wellbeing coach with Norwich City FC. Amazingly, I've been awarded England Athletics' run leader of the year award. My own running goals include taking on the Berlin Marathon this September.

One neurologist explained that I would never get beyond the anger stage unless I grieved the death of the old me and enjoyed being "Dudley Mk2". I learned to draw a line under my old life and stop comparing it with now. Running's now something that clears the storm clouds whirling around my head like a tornado. Things become calmer afterwards and I can take on the rest of the day after a run.' ►

Dudley supports Headway, the UK-wide charity that works to improve life after brain injury with support and information. Visit headway.org.uk

‘Injuring my brain has totally changed me’

DEBBIE GRAY, 53, FROM DERBY



Debbie has found balance in her life through running

‘I changed from the person I once was after having an accident while out cycling with my husband Mark and fellow club riders. I saw my wheel going into a pothole and the next thing I remember I was lying in the road with Mark calling 999. I’d hit my head and there was a small dent in my helmet.

I refused to get in the ambulance, got back on my bike and finished the last 20km of the 100K event. But I felt odd and remember saying to Mark, “I know this sounds a silly question, but what are we doing?” I collapsed into a crying heap after the ride and Mark took me straight to A&E. I kept incorrectly answering the nurse’s simple questions and was diagnosed with concussion. I was told to take paracetamol and rest, and if I felt sick or suffered any other warning signs mentioned in the leaflet they gave me, to come back. They said I might not feel right for a few months. When I said I was running the Manchester Marathon in four weeks, the nurse said I should take it easy. I thought I’d be fine after resting for a week or two.

In the days following my accident in September 2021, I had a horrendous headache, felt very fatigued and was weepy. I struggled to concentrate at work. Exercise was impossible and so my marathon didn’t happen. It frustrated me, as I’d always been active and had been a runner for about 10 years, completing marathons and ultras. But now when I tried exercising, my heart rate shot up, I suffered headaches and I needed a day to recover.

Four months after my accident I tried my first short, slow run and it felt really tough. I went back to basics, following the Couch to 5K programme. I’m someone who needs a goal, so I targeted the London Marathon last October after gaining a Headway charity place.

As my accident affected my balance, I began using walking poles while running, which helped. But I was much slower than before, with even parkrun being a struggle. Although I was pleased to be running again, I would still constantly compare myself with what I could do before. That’s the hardest thing to accept.

Despite training for it, I had no idea how I would tackle the marathon. After running the first 90 minutes, I did a run-walk to stop my heart rate going too high and triggering headaches. I felt a mix of emotions as I finished; I ran it in 4:32, but I knew that before the injury, I would have been about 45 minutes faster. I’d planned to meet friends in a pub afterwards, but the noise and bustle meant I stayed in the toilets and burst into tears instead. I just wanted Mark to take me home.

Since the accident, I’m more emotional. Busy settings overload my brain and make me very tired. I’m now more forgetful and my short-term memory’s not what it was. I’ve been seeing a neuropsychologist who has helped lots, especially regarding getting back into exercise and finding a good balance. I’d like to be more competitive with my running again, but I’m trying not to put any pressure on myself.

Looking at me, you wouldn’t know anything’s wrong, but injuring my brain has totally changed me. In some ways, I think I’m privileged to have come out of it less scathed than others. It’s helped me better understand people living with a hidden disability. I realise that, while someone may look fine, you never know what’s going on inside their head.’

'Running has helped me to do what I do now'

MARK KENNEDY, 48, FROM NORTHAMPTON

'I've been a runner for more than 15 years after picking it up fairly naturally. Within a year of starting, I'd done the Great North Run and the London Marathon. I joined Northampton Road Runners, embracing everything from keeping fit, chasing times and competing at obscure races to enjoying the social side.

In 2012, my wife Jules and I went on holiday to the Canaries. Early in our trip we went for tapas, and during the meal I went to the toilet, but I can't remember much after that. Jules later told me that when I failed to return, she went looking and found me in a mess inside the cubicle after hitting my head. We think it was a reaction to the seafood.

I went to the island's hospital, but was discharged with medication after being told I had an ear infection. The doctor said to go to A&E for a scan once I was back home to be on the safe side. After sleeping through the next two days, we flew back six days after the fall. I went straight for the scans at our local hospital before being taken to Oxford's John Radcliffe Hospital. The scans showed I had fractured my skull, causing a bleed on the right side of my brain. The doctor said it was so serious that most people with this injury don't survive.

There was talk of surgery, but it was eventually decided I should go home to rest. Luckily, the swelling went down naturally over the next eight weeks, although I felt very tired and had a strange feeling inside my head. I remember one doctor telling me lots of things I should avoid doing, but there were others I could do – one of them being returning to running.

I began with some light jogs and parkruns, which felt fine. But lots of other things in my life had changed. As well as the constant fatigue, I became anxious in crowded spaces and made mistakes in my job as a motivational speaker. I suffered from memory loss, too. On one occasion, despite making plans beforehand, when my running friend arrived the next morning, I had no idea about where or what type of run we'd planned. Lots of other things I'm told no longer sink in.

These types of issues continued and, six years after the accident, I thought this was how my life would now be. Around this period, I went to see my GP as I was struggling to cope. He referred me to a brain injury unit, where I did some rehab programmes and spoke to their experts. I found I wasn't alone and there were ways to deal with how I was still feeling.

Running has continued to play a big part in this journey. I set myself a challenge of completing 100 half marathons and ran them in places as diverse as Goa and Benidorm. It was fantastic to plan and then tick them off. It led to me writing a book about achieving my goal in 2021 (I had already written a book about my injury and its aftermath). One of the real positives from writing the first book with Jules was reading what she went through due to my brain injury. In many ways, it's as tough for others seeing how someone close to them has been affected.

I'm convinced running has helped me to do what I do now. I've learned to accept that my accident has changed me from who I was before it happened.' ►

Mark's books include *Half Man, Half Marathon* (£8.99) and *What The Hell Just Happened?* (£10), both available from amazon.co.uk

Mark was inspired to write about his trauma experience

‘A life-threatening situation gave me a different appreciation of running’

CLARE WILSON, 49, FROM BLITHBURY, STAFFORDSHIRE

‘I’ve run for around 30 years, completing numerous half marathons and other races across the country. Running always helps me to clear my mind and stay mentally strong. I simply love being outside.

But my life dramatically changed without warning in 2016. One Sunday afternoon, I suddenly felt very dizzy and my neck stiffened after I’d been bending down. I temporarily lost sight in my left eye and knew something was seriously wrong. My husband, Andy, carried me upstairs and the pain became horrendous – like someone had sliced off the top of my head. I endured it until the early hours of the morning before calling an ambulance. Once at our local hospital, I had a lumbar puncture and CT scan, which showed I’d suffered a brain haemorrhage. I was blue-lighted to The Walton Centre in Liverpool.

It was touch and go whether I’d survive, as I needed emergency surgery to stop the ruptured aneurysm [a bulge in the blood vessel in the brain] bleeding. After successful surgery, I spent a few days in the high-dependency unit and then remained in hospital for three weeks. Once home, I tried putting my life back together. My left foot dragged slightly and everything I did took a little bit longer; I lost my confidence and worried that every cough or sneeze might cause another bleed on the brain. But I’m a very positive person and knew I couldn’t live my life as a recluse, so I made Andy get me out. I went back to work a month later, taking things very gently.

About 10 weeks after my haemorrhage, I did my first run. I was nervous, worrying about what the movement might do to my head, even though my consultant reassured me it was safe. I started with a run-walk, slowly building it up to a 5K race with Andy four months after surgery. I had a different appreciation of running after facing a life-threatening situation only weeks earlier.

I had regular check-ups and MRI scans, which found a second aneurysm that also needed surgery. A third aneurysm was later discovered and, unlike the others where surgery was done via my groin, this one will go directly into my skull later this year.

I owe my life to The Walton Centre and wanted to give something back. Last year, I organised a month-long triathlon to raise funds to buy a piece of rehab equipment. I did a triathlon that included a daily 5K run, as did others in my challenge team. It was such a positive experience and we raised £26,000.

Although I’m still me, my perspective has changed. I love the same things I’ve always cared about, but now even more so, while not bothering with the negative stuff that drains energy. I’ve got more scary surgery soon, but I feel blessed with all the positives in my life.

Running is one of those things I still love doing. We’re going on a two-week US road trip later this year and will take our running kit. In the past, we’ve done a wonderful run up the Hollywood Hills in Los Angeles, which we plan to do again. I know we’ll be slower and it won’t be as easy, but it’s these kind of experiences that make running so special.’

If you want to fundraise for The Walton Centre, the NHS neurology and neurosurgery hospital, visit thewaltoncentrecharity.org

DO I HAVE CONCUSSION?

Concussion is a temporary interruption of neurological function after an injury. It can occur with or without a loss of consciousness and as a result of either direct impact or rotational forces to the brain. If you think you may be concussed, use this list of common signs to establish if you need to see a medical professional

- ☐ HEADACHE
- ☐ RINGING IN THE EARS (TINNITUS)
- ☐ NAUSEA/VOMITING
- ☐ FATIGUE OR DROWSINESS
- ☐ BLURRED VISION
- ☐ CONFUSION OR ‘FOGGY BRAIN’
- ☐ AMNESIA SURROUNDING THE TRAUMATIC EVENT
- ☐ DIZZINESS

Clare's injuries have required multiple surgeries

MIND HOW YOU GO

Consultant neurosurgeon Farouk Olubajo, a major trauma specialist at The Walton Centre, Liverpool, on the potential benefits and necessary precautions when returning to running following brain injury

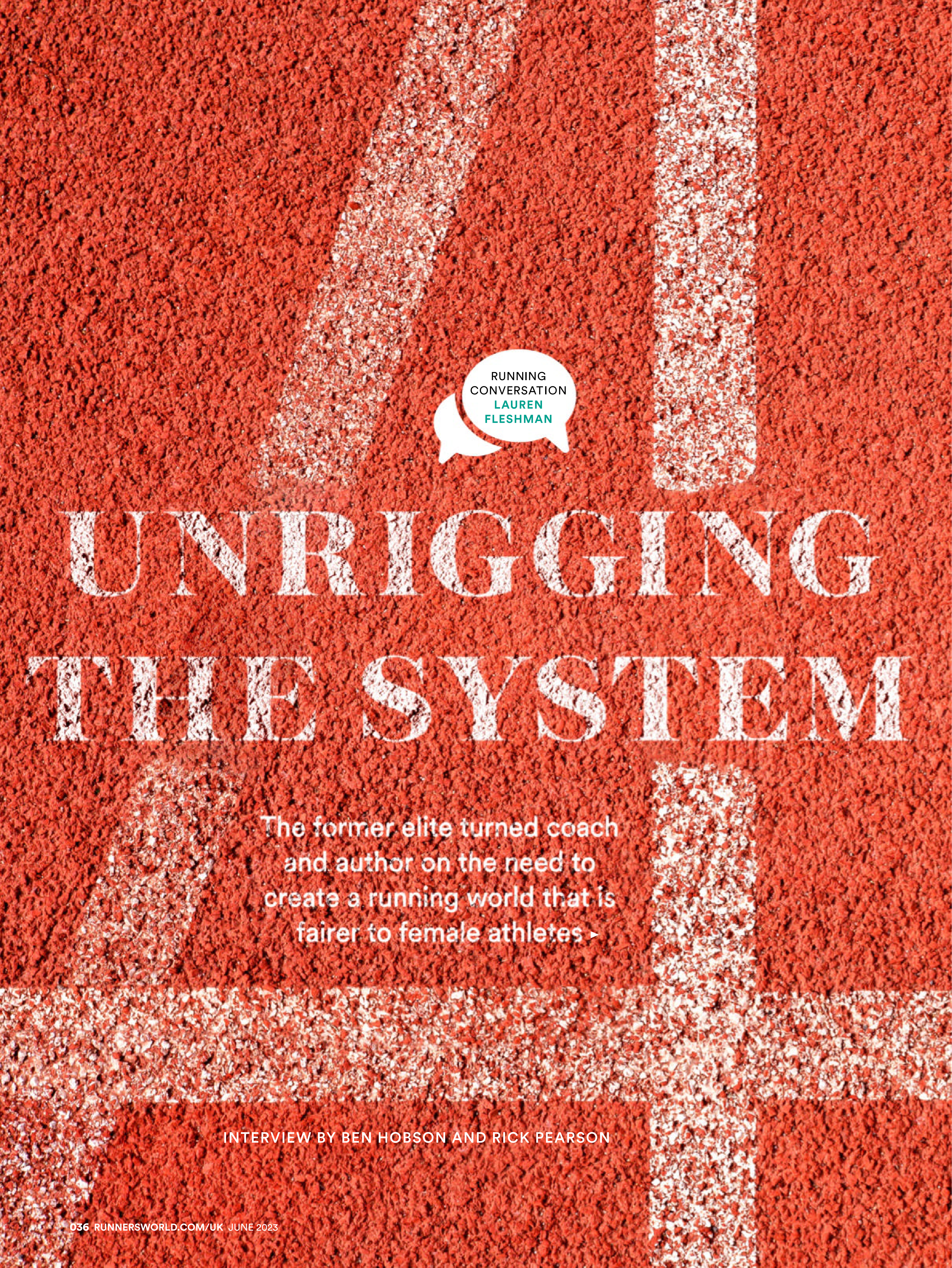
'There's no blanket rule in terms of timing for returning to exercise after a head injury, but serious cases that required an inpatient stay may mean strenuous exercise, and particularly contact sport, should be avoided for six weeks to three months.'

'A big concern is how alert someone is. Concussion can leave you fatigued and confused, which could lead to a fall. The greatest threat is sustaining another head injury, which can lead to severe consequences, including brain swelling, which can be life-threatening.'

'It's vital to be fully recovered without residual symptoms before returning to running, slowly building distance and intensity. Don't be afraid to dial back if you're struggling. Regaining your pre-injury fitness may take time, but is achievable if you don't have a significant brain injury.'

'Psychological fallout from a head injury can impact your physical recovery. Personality changes can affect quality of life – acknowledging and managing the psychological impact of the head injury is vitally important and can require expert support.'

'Exercise increases brain function by improving cognition, learning and memory. Running can also help psychologically through natural endorphins, and running with others aids social reassimilation. So, if done safely, running can promote head injury recovery.'



RUNNING CONVERSATION
LAUREN FLESHMAN

UNRIGGING THE SYSTEM

The former elite turned coach and author on the need to create a running world that is fairer to female athletes ▸

INTERVIEW BY BEN HOBSON AND RICK PEARSON

Motor.

AFTER HER GLITTERING SUCCESS AS A SCHOOL AND COLLEGE RUNNER,

Lauren Fleshman had what many would regard as a stellar professional career, becoming US 5000m champion twice and competing at the World Championships in 2003, 2005 and 2011, when she placed seventh in the 5000m final. She also enjoyed post-track success over 26.2, including a 16th-place finish at the 2011 New York Marathon. However, her professional years were dogged by injuries that she felt prevented her from reaching her full potential; and the timing cost her perhaps the ultimate dream of every runner. On Fleshman's retirement in 2016, the *New York Times* described her as 'most likely being the best American distance runner never to make an Olympic team'.

Fleshman believes hers is not a bad luck story, but the product of a sporting world that is out of sync with female physiology. Adding to her own experience, she spent time researching the science and sought to find a better way of working with female athletes as a coach. She has now shared both her knowledge and her story in a new book, *Good For A Girl*. Fleshman sat down with *RW* to explore some of the pitfalls and prejudices that female athletes at every level encounter, and give us a glimpse of a running world that is fairer to all.

STANFORD
ORACLE
FLESHMAN
US OPEN
Stanford, CA

KENYA
TOYOTA
MASAI

RUNNER'S WORLD Could you give us an introduction to your running career and the experiences you share in *Good For A Girl*?

LAUREN FLESHMAN 'I was one of the top high-school runners of all time in the US. Then I was recruited to Stanford University where I had a Hall of Fame career of five NCAA [National Collegiate Athletic Association] championship titles, 15 All-American honours, with three back-to-back outdoor 5K titles. Then I had a 13-year professional career that had a lot of ups and downs – I would say I didn't fulfil the promise that my collegiate career and records projected. And that's the basis of the story: where things go right and where things go wrong – and who we attribute those things to. There's a tendency to attribute so many of the problems that female athletes face to the athletes themselves – and of course there is some personal responsibility – but there are also a lot of systemic problems that are the true root of many of the issues making up the roller coaster of the female-athlete career.'

RW So it was your personal experience that motivated you to write the book and highlight these issues?

LF 'Definitely. Through high school and college I had a pretty storybook career. There are a lot of places where female athletes hit landmines pretty predictably. The first is during the period of breast development, when female athletes are dropping out of sports at three or four times the rate of male athletes. Then the menstrual cycle happens and there's this whole other thing to deal with. When you have a sports system that's built around the male body, there are all these problem places. And although female athletes gained access to the system, we didn't actually have a say in shaping the system that we participate in. There are a lot of assumptions of sameness between females and males built into that system, assumptions that might work to advance equality in many industries, but in sport, ignoring sex-based differences leads to harm and pain. I didn't really experience it in college or school myself, but I saw it happening around me. I had a competitor who just kicked my butt one year and then disappeared the next. There's a long stream of promising young female athletes whose names you just don't hear of again.

'So in the book, I wanted to use my career to give the reader a front-row seat to see this pathway of the development of a female body in a male sports system. I saw it happen around me and didn't understand it at first either. Then I started to figure it out as a professional, when I started to come up against the forces that took down a lot of my teammates – the pressure to be thin, the pressure to make

MAIN IMAGE: LEAH NASH/NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX/EYEVINE.
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: OISELLE RYAN WARNER; GETTY IMAGES; ALAMY

your body into something that isn't developmentally appropriate for your age and developmental stage, all these things. When it started happening to me, I turned to my human biology degree, to use my science literacy to research it and try to understand it.

'After I retired from competing, I wanted to become a coach to female athletes so I could do things differently. I was very passionate about trying to create the environment that I wished I'd had – and that I wished all young, developing female athletes had. After eight years of coaching, I wrote the book. I'm proud of it and I hope it helps some people.'

RW What would be some of the hallmarks of a female-centric sports system?

LF 'A lot of people don't understand that most globally funded sports institutions are serving 13 to 22-year-olds. That's especially true in the US, with our NCAA system, but in the UK and other places around the world they're also developing young adult talent through their own systems. But those systems were designed around the 13 to 22-year-old male body. And 13 to 22-year-old males are going through a very advantageous physiological change during those years – it's pretty much all up. If you don't experience an injury or significant life setback, your physiology is primed through male puberty to give you increased testosterone and androgens, increased strength, recovery power, all these things. Between 12-year-old boys and 12-year-old girls there are really no sex-based differences in performance, but as puberty hits there's this shift. From the age of around 12 and a half to 20, there is a distinct difference between how males and females progress.

'The sports system has been built around the male progression. Take US college scholarships, which a lot of UK athletes come to the US on; they're designed around who is the best at 17 or 18. This is the exact age when the female body – if left to develop on its healthy, totally normal timeline – is going through a developmental plateau or even a temporary slump. And if you built the sports system around the female body, you'd never time the greatest incentives around those ages. But since they're there, and what female athletes are going through at that time isn't acknowledged and respected, there's this massive pressure to mimic a male athlete's experience in a female body. So to a lot of female athletes, coaches and even parents, the natural changes in the female body at this time are viewed as a negative thing, a threat. But we all know that the world's best female runners are in women's bodies. They have gone through puberty and they're strong women. Records aren't held by prepubescent girls. We need to go through this change to reach our ultimate potential. And to have a sports system in which female athletes can thrive, we need to shift some of the incentives and look at the longer term.

'It's hugely important that we embrace and encourage a wider diversity of bodies. We make this assumption that, to excel, female bodies need to have this very narrow band of body fat at the ages of 13 to 22, like a male body does, but that's not actually true. I think there's more body diversity possible for excellence in the female body. You see it in many sports, such as women's tennis and women's gymnastics – which is a great example as it has changed dramatically recently. We need to stop comparing ourselves to and aiming for the default male form and focus on what is already naturally happening to the female athlete form, and to respect that, make space for it and see what happens.'

'ALTHOUGH FEMALE ATHLETES GAINED ACCESS TO THE SYSTEM, WE DIDN'T HAVE A SAY IN SHAPING IT'

TOYOTA
DIBABA
Daegu 2011
TOYOTA
FLESHMAN
Daegu 2011

Left: Lauren Fleshman at the women's 1500m at the US Open Track & Field Invitational, 2002. This page: competing in the women's 5000m heats at the 2011 IAAF World Championships in Daegu

RW Why has there been such reluctance to talk about the impact of the menstrual cycle on performance?

LF 'In all industries where women have entered into male spaces, we've had to try to mimic the male experience to fit in – male culture, male jokes, male language. Eventually we get to a point where we think, "Okay, there are enough of us here now that we can change things." The #MeToo movement is a great example. But the things that differ with the female-embodied experience have, until very recently, been a taboo subject. You'd never acknowledge that your menstrual cycle affected your performance negatively, because it would be admitting to the very thing that had been used to exclude you and people like you for a really long time. It's the same as being pregnant in the workforce – there are all these penalties for being pregnant and if you ►

admit that your pregnancy is affecting your performance, you feel like you're doing a disservice to the women around you. But if you don't admit it, you perpetuate the cycle of having to suffer in silence. We should completely expect that in female sport we're going to have competitions that are sometimes affected negatively by our menstrual cycles, and that should be part of the drama of sport. And here's a question for male runners: if males had periods and your performance in a key moment could be notched down by 5% as a consequence of bad timing, how would you feel? At the very least it should be something that you feel you're able to talk about. If you got a cold, you'd want to talk about it, right?'

RW How damaging is the pressure on female athletes to suppress their cycles?

LF 'If the stakes are so high that, say, your contract depends on getting a certain placing at a championship, and that happens to be the day you get your period, it makes you horrified to get it, and incentivised not to. And if you aren't getting your period, you have three to five times the risk of getting a stress fracture. Your bone density will be lower and you have this small window of around 12 years to build your 'bone bank' for your whole life. That window closes at around 26 or 27. The menstrual cycle isn't just about baby-making, it's about depositing bone, optimum hormone levels, supporting your immune system, healing and recovery. It's an essential function to keep going, but to keep it going you have to accept some unpredictability in your performance. Not every female athlete is affected in the same way – some have no problem with their period and performance. It's highly individualised. I'm glad people are now talking about it. We need to keep doing so and to normalise it, especially for the younger athletes.'

> **'IF MALE RUNNERS HAD PERIODS AND PERFORMANCE COULD BE AFFECTED, HOW WOULD THEY FEEL?'**

RW In exercise research, so many of the study groups are either largely or entirely men. Is that another area where we need change?

LF 'It all comes back to that assumption of sameness. It's convenient to assume that males and females are the same – and we are more alike than we are different – but to assume that our physiology is going to work in exactly the same way and you can apply an all-male study to everyone will be a problem most of the time. Around 15% to 17% of studies in exercise physiology include female athletes, and very few are only female athletes. Studying us as our own group is rare, so obviously we need more of that.

'Something I find fascinating about this assumption of sameness is it's a sort of unintended consequence of the liberal feminist movement of the 1970s. There was a period of time when it was essential that women focused on the ways in which we are the same as men, because in order to achieve basic elements of equality, we needed to say, "We're the same as you" to the people in power. We had to counter all this pseudoscience that was being weaponised against us, you know, "your uterus will fall out". Focusing on the ways in which we're the same worked; it got us access to many of the spaces that we had been excluded from, like sport. But now we see that there are limits to treating us the same; that we would thrive if we had our sports systems built around our norms and our differences.'

RW How much is down to educating male coaches, and how much is about getting more female coaches?

LF 'I think it's mostly education. Of course, I would love to see more women in coaching. I was one of very few female coaches in the professional athlete space, but whether we achieve more equity in coaching or not, everyone requires education, and that includes women. "Also menstruates" is not a job qualification – you might be less likely to make some of the mistakes, but we know that people are likely to repeat the culture they experienced, and consequently that there are plenty of female coaches who emphasise a culture of body-shaming and age-inappropriate leanness for female athletes. We need a fundamental shift with required education and a special certification to coach anyone in a female athlete body that demonstrates a basic grasp of female puberty, female physiology and a normal, healthy performance wave. Having that basic level of understanding would mean so many fewer problems for female athletes.'

RW And presumably a better understanding of female physiology would lead to improved performance from female athletes?

LF 'Absolutely. For any athlete, male or female, the worst thing is to miss time – it's inconsistency. If you can get through with minimal illness and injury and stack together the months and the years, you'll reach your ultimate potential. It's the missed time that kills you, and so many female athletes are missing time not because their body changes, but because when it does it's not met with a welcoming environment but seen as a threat. Then they start to fight their body, and fighting the body leads to broken bones, injured tendons, suppressed immune systems and ultimately missing time. And once you miss time, you're fighting to come back too soon and you get injured again, and you get stuck in this cycle.'

RW You have first-hand experience of being locked in the injury cycle. What triggered that, after your spectacular and problem-free early success?

LF 'I started to view my body as being wrong for the job. I compared myself to a profile of Paula Radcliffe on the World Athletics website; I saw height and weight listed and thought, "Well, we're the same height and she weighs 10lb less than me, so I should lose 10lb." But it was totally inappropriate for me – and I actually found out when I talked to her years later that she never even weighed that!

'Because of that shift to thinking my body was wrong, I ended up having four stress fractures. The years during which I stayed healthy I was the national champion twice, I was seventh at the World Championships, but I lost so much time to injury that I never really got to find out how good I was. I'm over it now as there are so many other things in life, but it's painful when you try so hard and dedicate your life and you're sidelined by completely avoidable, preventable things.'

Lauren Fleshman wants equality in the running world. Below left: at the Boston Marathon, 2022. Below: with the West Region girls team at the 2004 Foot Locker Cross Country Championships

RW Does all this matter to people outside elite sport?

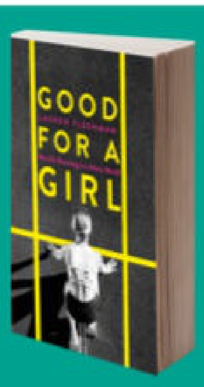
LF 'What I've learned from non-athletes who have read my book, especially women, is that it's something you can identify with if you're going through life feeling like the body you're in is wrong. The space that takes up in your mind and the joy it steals from you, it's like this static that interferes with hearing the music of life. The times when I was really hard on myself about how I looked, something that a huge percentage of the female population also experiences, you are dampening your capacity to achieve, how big you can love – all these thing are impacted by how you feel in your body. So I think there's a larger story here: any system that's causing a group of people to feel wrong in their bodies needs to be changed. The ripples of how that will spread into the world are substantial.'

RW Clearly there's still a long way to go, but do you think we're making progress in gender equality?

LF 'Yes and no. I'm really encouraged by the boost in research. Kirsty Elliott-Sale in the UK is driving all this amazing research on the menstrual cycle and performance that's shaping other people's research all over the world. Then there's also Kate Ackerman with REDS, Trent Stellingwerff… a lot of female-specific work is being done, and that's exciting. We really aren't making much progress on getting women into coaching, though, and as I mentioned before, I don't think anything is going to change until we have a specific coaching certification for the female athlete body, with a certain level of required base-level education.

'A big area in which I feel we're actually going backwards is the sexualisation of female athletes. I'm not the most smoking hot athlete on the planet or anything, but I aligned with traditional western beauty standards in a way that got me paid more than if I had run the same times and wasn't deemed attractive by the male executives writing the cheques. That's all cloaked under this idea of "marketability"– and marketability for a female athlete is extremely important in terms of who gets paid. In some countries, you have some kind of exclusively merit-based funding that guarantees you can at least stay in the sport for a while if you're not attractive to the male executives with the chequebooks, but in the US we don't have that so the people you see representing the US aren't necessarily our most talented and most promising. It's some of that, but it's also about who is viewed as someone who will sell the most shoes because of the way they look. It adds an exceptional amount of pressure, and you're sort of living your life for the male gaze instead of just living in your body.

'One of the most beautiful things about sport, one of the things women fought so hard for, is to have that same arena men do, where we can use our bodies in these powerful ways that aren't sexual. You find a home in your body based on how you can tick off 400m repeats, how you can put on a finishing kick – all these things you can do that have nothing to do with the way you look. But that beast is more powerful than ever in the marketing space in women's sport – and that's discouraging.'



Good For A Girl: My Life Running In A Man's World (Virago) by Lauren Fleshman is out now

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GREAT GREENS

These nutritional all-stars of the fruit and veg aisle are at their seasonal finest right now. Here are the greens to go for and how to get them on your menu

Watercress
A peppery punch for salad and sauces. If you love to notch up some extra creativity points, go beyond the bowl and blend into a flavourful pesto that also contains vitamin C.

Watercress walnut pesto

TOTAL: 10 MINS
MAKES 450ML

INGREDIENTS

- **70g** firmly packed watercress leaves
- **60g** toasted walnuts, crushed
- **1** large garlic clove, grated
- **30g** parmesan, grated
- **125ml** olive oil, chilled

MAKE IT

1 / In a food processor, pulse the watercress, walnuts, garlic, parmesan and ½ tsp each of salt and pepper until roughly chopped.

2 / With the machine running, drizzle in the oil and puree until blended but not too smooth. Season to taste. ►

Microgreens
The seedlings of pretty much any vegetable, these miniatures are more than a garnish. 'They're a very concentrated source of nutrients compared to the plants' mature leaves,' says dietitian Amanda Baker Lemein.

Microgreens salad

TOTAL: 15 MINS
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- **2 tbsp** red wine vinegar
- **2 tsp** wholegrain mustard
- **1 tsp** Dijon mustard
- **½ tsp** honey
- ½ small bulb of fennel, thinly sliced
- ¼ small onion, thinly sliced
- **2** heads of gem lettuce
- **110g** microgreens

MAKE IT

1 / In a bowl, whisk together the vinegar, mustards, honey, 1 tbsp warm water and ½ tsp salt. Add the fennel and onion and allow to sit for 5 mins or so.

2 / Add the lettuce leaves and toss to coat. Gently fold in the microgreens.

Thai-style peanut chicken wraps

TOTAL: 25 MINS
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- **½ tin** unsweetened light coconut milk
- **½ tbsp** + **¼ tsp** chilli sauce
- **350g** skinless chicken breasts, cut into thin slices
- **4** large leaves of Swiss chard
- **2 tbsp** lime juice
- **2 tbsp** crunchy peanut butter
- **1 tsp** honey
- **½ tsp** grated fresh ginger
- **1** medium carrot
- **2** small cucumbers
- **1** small red pepper, sliced

MAKE IT

1 / Whisk the coconut milk with ½ tbsp chilli sauce. Reserve 120ml of the mix. Add the chicken to the rest and refrigerate for 20 mins.

2 / Simmer 1 inch of water in a large frying pan. Fill a bowl with ice water. Line a baking tray with clean dish towels. Take 1 chard leaf and trim its stem to make it level with the rest of the leaf. Add it to the simmering water for 30 secs; transfer to the ice water, then to the tray. Repeat.

3 / Make the peanut dipping sauce: whisk together 1 tbsp lime juice, the peanut butter, honey, ginger, 2 tbsp of the reserved coconut mixture and ¼ tsp chilli sauce; set aside.

4 / Heat a griddle pan over a medium flame. Peel the carrot into ribbons and toss with the rest of the lime juice.

5 / Remove the chicken from the marinade and griddle till lightly charred (1 to 2 mins). Flip and continue cooking, basting with the coconut mixture, until cooked through (3 to 6 mins). Transfer to a chopping board, brush with the remaining coconut mix and rest before slicing.

6 / Cut the cucumber into ribbons. Pile each chard leaf with veg and chicken and roll them into wraps. Serve alongside the sauce. ►

Chard

Kale, step aside. This dark, leafy nutritional powerhouse is a worthy alternative. It's tender yet hearty and packed with bone-building vitamin K. It's ideal blanched and rolled, as in the mouth-watering dish here.

Sautéed-dandelion toast

TOTAL: 15 MINS
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- **2 tbsp** olive oil
- **1** small red onion, thinly sliced
- **⅛ tsp** chilli flakes
- **2 tbsp** lemon juice plus **1 tsp** grated zest
- **1 bunch** dandelion greens, 15cm stalk discarded
- **110g** feta
- **60g** natural yoghurt
- **1** ciabatta loaf, split in half and toasted
- Small mint leaves, to serve

MAKE IT

1 / Heat the oil in a large frying pan on medium. Add the onion and chilli flakes and sauté until just tender (around 6 mins). Add the lemon juice and cook until it evaporates, around 30 secs.

2 / Remove from the heat, add the dandelion greens, season with ¼ tsp each of salt and pepper and toss until the greens wilt.

3 / Meanwhile, crumble the feta into a mini food processor and pulse a few times. With the food processor running, add the yoghurt, then the lemon zest and puree until smooth and creamy. Spread on the ciabatta, then top with the greens and sprinkle with mint.

Dandelion greens

Think these leaves are just weeds? Think again. They offer a slightly spicy flavour and beneficial micronutrients, says Lemein. Try them sautéed like spinach, chopped and folded into scrambled eggs or mixed into a salad.

Pak choi

This sibling of cabbage garners star status for its heavy dose of fibre and calcium in every forkful. It can withstand grilling, steaming or sautéing, so feel free to get creative with this versatile veggie.

Griddled baby pak choi

TOTAL: 15 MINS
SERVES: 4

INGREDIENTS

- **1** navel orange, halved
- **1 tsp** grated lime zest, + **2 tbsp** lime juice
- **½ tsp** honey
- **1 tsp** grated fresh ginger
- ½ garlic clove, grated
- **1** jalapeño, thinly sliced
- **3 tbsp** olive oil, divided
- **4 heads** of baby pak choi, halved

MAKE IT

1 / Heat a griddle pan to medium-high. Juice ½ an orange into a bowl (you should have about 2 tbsp); cut the remaining ½ into 3 wedges. Add the lime zest and juice to the bowl and whisk in the honey and ½ tsp salt to dissolve. Stir in the ginger, garlic, jalapeño slices and 2 tbsp oil.

2 / Toss the pak choi with the remaining oil and season with salt. Griddle cut-side down for 2 mins, then turn and cook until just tender (1 to 2 mins) and transfer to a serving plate. Griddle the orange wedges until just charred (1 to 2 mins) and plate up. Drizzle the dressing over the pak choi.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JULIA GARTLAND. FOOD STYLING: LAUREN LAPENNA. PROP STYLING: SUMMER MOORE. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

THE CHOSEN FEW

Finishing the 256-mile **Trans Japan Alps Race** is an incredible feat of endurance, but the years-long qualification process to earn a place on the start line is merciless. ***RW* looks inside what may be the world's most exclusive ultra club**

words
SCOTT YORKO

photography
MIWAZA JEMIMAH

‘My life is getting shorter,’

says Naomasa Kimura over a fried pork cutlet rice bowl drizzled in a sweet and savoury sauce. ‘It’s too much. I promised my wife this is the last time I try… It’s a touchy subject.’ The 41-year-old inventory manager at a tractor company in Osaka is sitting at a cramped restaurant table with five other men eating the same dish in the lush, wooded town of Komagane that sits in the valley splitting Japan’s Southern and Central Alps.

It’s a cool, damp June evening and cheery garden gnomes are perched on a windowsill politely observing the conversation. Most of the men are rail-thin with muscular legs, and several are wearing T-shirts from 100-mile races. They’ve each run a sub-3:20 marathon in the past year (most sub-3:00), a feat that satisfies one of the many prerequisites to even be invited to tomorrow’s Athlete Selection Event, a two-day qualifier for the biennial Trans Japan Alps Race (TJAR) in August. The encyclopaedic rabbit hole of entry requirements and necessary physical achievements is so demanding and convoluted that qualifying for one of the 30 spots in the actual race might be more impressive, and dangerous, than finishing it.

Roughly 70 applicants submitted documentation of their attempts to meet the requirements, which, among many other things, included camping at least 10 nights above 2,000m and completing a race with a time cut-off of 25 hours or more in less than 60% of that time. With 60 available spots, 59 runners gained entry to the two-day trial.

Those who ultimately qualify for the TJAR get to race 256 miles south from the Sea of Japan to the Pacific Ocean, crossing three prefectures and three mountain ranges with 27,000m of elevation gain and descent. That’s the equivalent of running up and down 3,775m Mt Fuji from sea level seven times within eight consecutive days, entirely self-supported, and in August – the muggiest time of year at the peak of Japan’s typhoon season. Just to cross the finish line is considered such a badge of honour that no racers, even first-place winners, receive prize money or trophies. The reward is gaining entry into the exclusive clique of finishers.

‘This training is taking a toll on me physically,’ says Kimura as the others crammed in around him shake their heads and chuckle. One of them, Yusuke Hayashida from Tokyo, pulls up Kimura’s Strava profile on his phone and passes it around. Everyone’s eyeballs bulge and they all let out different tones of ‘Ooooo!’. Since March, he’s done a 100km training run every weekend, sometimes squeezing in a 50K before work and a marathon on his lunch break. He says the 70,000m of elevation gain he’s racked up in six months is low because he’d been training on flat land so much for the marathons.

Someone suggests that Kimura has a shot at dethroning Shogo Mochizuki, known to all as ‘the King’ for finishing the race five times and winning four consecutively – setting the course record in 2016 with a time of four days, 23 hours, 52 minutes. (To better challenge himself in 2018, he voluntarily carried all of his own food without resupplying in towns along the way and still finished seventh.)

Kimura is shocked and embarrassed that the question was raised. ‘He is the King. He can’t be beat. He is a legend for us.’

JOINING THE CLUB

THE ATHLETE SELECTION EVENT BEGINS THE NEXT MORNING – a dark and rainy 2.30am – with the gear check. Officials with clipboards inspect the contents of each runner’s pack, splayed out across a labelled tarp like a game of Twister. The 27-item mandatory gear list includes two headlamps with spare batteries, a compass, a mountain insurance card, a tent shelter (it can’t be a bivvy sack), a basic first aid kit, a gas stove and lighter with a minimum 300ml pot, rubber caps for trekking pole tips, an emergency locator beacon and two wag bags (portable toilet kits). To reach this event, runners also presented evidence of their completion of an advanced life-saving course, a doctor’s certificate of health and a letter of consent from their spouse or a close relative. Once they successfully complete the morning’s gear and paperwork check, their phones are stapled inside a plastic case and the runners are given non-waterproof paper maps of the area, which they’ll use to orienteer the 49-mile course by compass.

The mood is sombre and hushed. Most of the runners have been preparing for years and to blow this opportunity would be crushing. Roaming among the crowd is Paul Deckret, a 42-year-old American expat who established permanent residency in Japan after arriving in 2003 to teach English. ‘Preparing to enter this race is all I dream and think about,’ Deckret told me from across a short table, sitting on the floor of a steamy Japanese barbecue in March 2021. Until recently, he worked for the tourism board in the ski resort town of Hakuba while pursuing his mountain guide certifications and building a family with his Japanese wife and newborn son. Now, with his certifications in hand and Japan’s borders reopened to tourists, Deckret runs a guiding outfit. ‘I earn money to essentially train,’ he says.

Since 2017, he’s been poring over dictionary-thick books filled with past race reports, including gear lists, training regimens and lessons learned by runners on each section of the course. Deckret is sitting this year out with a herniated disc. He’s in attendance as a supporter and superfan, and visibly giddy to be in the presence of his heroes.

Deckret has climbed Japan’s 100 tallest peaks and won ultras, including the Bunsuirei 80K – an unofficial TJAR feeder event that helps him meet the standards for the selection event. Deckret is a strong athlete, but not the fastest runner, which is why the TJAR appeals to him.

'I love to plan the shit out of things,' he says. That means timing optimal sleep breaks, pacing for each section and calculating the calories he'll carry. 'I can do it better than plenty of world-class athletes… but honestly, the pressure of the selection process scares me to death.'

For Deckret and many others, the greatest appeal lies in the prospect of getting inside this elite club of mountain-running legends. Japanese culture, while polite and welcoming, is filled with tight-knit groups and high bars for acceptance. It can take years, especially for gaijin (non-Japanese), to assimilate into communities in Japan, where the culture emphasises a respect for boundaries. Once his herniated disc has healed, Deckret could be the first gaijin runner to apply for the race with a real shot at completing it.

Deckret has befriended committee members and several finishers of the race, going for group runs and even joining them on an overnight new year's hike. But because he hasn't actually completed the race, he's only occasionally invited to their get-togethers.

Just before sunrise in Komagane, under the rain cover of a white tent, race director and four-time finisher Hiroshi Iijima uses a microphone to read rules about where runners can fill up water and how to follow the provided map. 'Run on any road you want to, but please obey all traffic laws,' he says. (In the 2018 race, one runner was very close to the 192-hour cut-off, but as he ran through the city of Shizouka towards the finish line, he had to wait for every traffic light to turn green or he would've been disqualified. 'It was very stressful,' he recalls. He made it with two minutes to spare.)

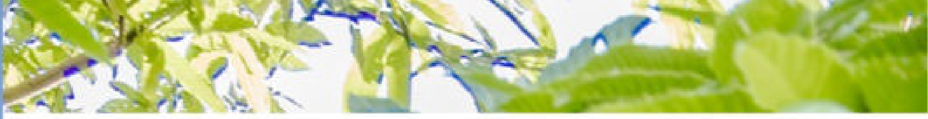
After the pre-race meeting, runners study the map like students cramming outside an exam room. The first day's 29-mile run leaves town to reach an uphill slog to a trailhead, rolls through dense, humid forest, then descends to a rocky campground. Amid the 3,500m of climbing and 2,370m of drop, the runners must find and record five checkpoints, including one with an emergency first aid simulation, en route to the campground where they'll spend the night. At the campground, runners present their maps to the race committee showing the exact location of the five official checkpoints marked within 4mm on the map, or 100m in represented distance. Then, runners must go from standing upright with their full backpacks on to completely assembling their tent and zipping themselves inside in under four minutes, after which the shelter's structural integrity is tested with a force-resistance device. Several renowned Japanese runners have aced all other requirements but failed this shelter test and never made it into the race.

The second day of the selection event follows with 20 miles of gruelling mountain and road running (1,650m up and 2,770m down), immediately after which exhausted runners are given a written test – offered only in Japanese – about weather and emergencies.

The King is hunched over a table, a white Casio watch on his wrist and turquoise KT tape on both knees, tracing the route with his finger. Standing alone nearby is a small, teenage-looking man clad head to toe in The North Face gear. This is 40-year-old Takashi Doi, a sponsored runner who took second at the 103-mile Ultra-Trail Mt Fuji in April and was on pace to shatter the King's TJAR course record the previous year when the race was cancelled on day two due to more than 12 hours of sustained 56mph winds (the pandemic had postponed 2020's race to 2021). Both are firefighters who work in mountain rescue.

After a group photo, the runners squint into the rising sun, and at 5.15am the gun sounds. They weave through Komagane's streets, their minimalist backpacks bulging with tightly configured accoutrements. Along the road out of town, green fields of rice paddies glow in the warm morning light. ►

PREVIOUS SPREAD: Athletes at the selection event study their maps before the first day's 29-mile run **BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT:** An athlete traces the red line marking the course; runners relax and prepare for the second day of the selection event in the relative comfort of their tents; one of the many climbs from the first day that slowed athletes to a hike



I ask why the process is so strict and the requirements so extensive. 'I don't want them to die,' Iijima says

ABOVE: Ryosuke Ichinoe (left) and Mitsuru Mikami cross the Tenryū River en route to the first climb. Ichinoe failed the selection event. Mikami passed but dropped out of the TJAR due to bad weather and exhaustion

At 6.20am, a handful of fervent fans gather on a bridge spanning the Tenryū River, the start of the long climb up to 1,680m Mt Tokura. A 15mph wind is cutting across the valley and with it appears Takashi Doi, clutching his map leading the front pack of eight. The fans clap and cheer and wave their hands with ferocious encouragement. Almost all the runners wave back at every spectator, sometimes with both hands, and often with a wide smile. 'I'm very tired,' says one runner in English, grinning as he passes. Several throw what they call the 'guts pose' – your classic biceps flex – before trudging up the incline.

As the paved road winds into the first mountain section, the challenge of an unmarked course becomes very real as runners try to follow their paper maps while determining their location based on landmarks and terrain features. Doi overshoots a shrouded trailhead with the King and Yuichi Konno – the 2008, 2010 and 2016 runner-up – in tow. They run uphill for a quarter of a mile before doubling back, finding a faint path into the woods and deploying their trekking poles for the ascent.

The next runners get an assist from a 68-year-old superfan with gold teeth named Tsuda, who's following the event on his silver scooter. Tsuda's perma-grin sparkles as he stands at the turn, pointing it out to a few runners sweating in the 26°C sun, until Deckret scolds him for breaking the no-support rule.

On the other side of Mt Tokura, at a small table on the valley floor, 43-year-old Kosuke Kaito is manning the first checkpoint that runners must mark on their maps. A furniture maker in the historic mountain city of Takayama, Kaito won the race in 2018 when the King ran carrying his supplies, and is sitting this year out as a volunteer. 'You do it once and you turn into a junkie,' he says. 'Like a drug, you build tolerance and need more of that thrill that you get at the end of the competition. The harder it is, the more high you get.'

At 8.55am, Tsuda scoots up and on to the pavement, dismounting just in time to honour each runner by clapping and shouting, 'Hooray!' The King, now in first place, bows in appreciation and crosses another bridge to start the next climb up 3,030m Mt Senjo under a shaded canopy of larch trees.

FEELING THE PRESSURE

DARK CLOUDS SURGE TOWARDS THE 1,980M CHOEGOYA HUT, the event's campground, just before 3pm. Runners are expected soon, and the 10 committee members are discussing how many pulls on the force measurement device to give each tent in the test. The consensus is one firm tug in all four directions at 3kg of resistance.

Thunder cracks overhead as the King strolls in, well ahead of the others. Several groupies follow, their cameras trained on his every step. 'I fell in love with him in the 2014 race,' says 76-year-old Kozo Okushima, wearing a hat autographed by Mochizuki. 'He gives his all and is a genuine, good person. Not pretentious and always humble.'

'Is it time for Mochizuki to pass the torch?' I ask. 'Never,' he says, shaking his head. 'Everyone looks up to him. It's important for him to be here. Many are here because of him.'

The King checks in, listens as a committee member reads the tent-assembly instructions before starting the stopwatch, and begins assembling his 170g, 7D nylon tent supported by two trekking poles held under tension from the guy lines. His movements are quick, decisive and flawless, pulling the tent fabric tight, staking out the corners and pinning them down with rocks. Without rushing, he checks the tent's stability and crawls in with his backpack, zipping it closed in 3:07. He gets out, laughs and massages a cramp while the committee pulls on his tent with their tool. 'So many people are watching,' he says. 'It's been a while since I felt this much pressure.'

His shelter holds up and he bows, thanking the committee, just as the rain starts to fall, as if the sky respectfully waited

for the King to finish. 'I'm not going for first place any more,' he tells a cameraman from Japanese public broadcaster NHK. 'I'll let the young people lead the pack now that I'm 44 and everything hurts. But when I think about whether it's time to stop because it feels different, I then think I need to keep challenging myself, even after more than 10 years of this.'

Thirty-four minutes after the King, as a committee member tells NHK that he's glad the weather is bad to keep it challenging for the runners, Takashi Doi arrives. He marks his checkpoints and prepares for the shelter test in heavy drizzle. Just before Doi starts, someone from the crowd points out that the sternum strap on his backpack is not fully buckled – another requirement – which he quickly fixes. Doi initially fumbles with his stakes and struggles to find soft ground to hammer them into with a rock, but still manages to zip himself inside in 2:57. The King watches.

Half an hour later, Konno limps into camp. His face is pained with defeat even though he's still in the top three. He's steady in the assembly of his tent and logs a comfortable time of 3:30, but when the force gauge comes out, something is clearly wrong. One of Konno's trekking poles is set 10cm shorter than the other, throwing off the stability of the shelter, and when the committee member pulls against the shorter pole, the whole tent collapses. Konno hangs his head. 'I will try again in two years,' he says.

Eventually, more runners trickle in, Kimura among them. Some smile but several are discouraged by their performance in the emergency first aid test. Required to tape their own ankle, many had trouble getting the wet tape to stick in the rain and ruminated on this potential failure for hours. Worse, it will be several more days before the committee confirms whether runners passed or failed the event.

The drizzle has turned to rain, the ground is getting soft, and a handful of runners have failed the tent test. Kimura starts pitching his shelter quickly, having practised 30 or 40 times. When he pulls on a guy line to tension the long end, the thin webbing attaching it to the tent fabric suddenly rips and the tent falls flat. 'Kiretaaa!' he cries, horror washing over his pale face. 'It snapped!'

In a panic, he rushes to tie the torn webbing back with a tiny knot and rethread the cord through the loop before gently pulling it tight again. This holds up to a few test pulls before he crawls inside in 3:37. He looks like he's going to cry when he gets out and watches the committee member pull against his makeshift repair, but his shelter stays upright. The crowd breathes a sigh of relief. 'The incident made me the most flustered in my life,' he later says. 'I thought it was all over.'

The rain and wind pick up as the day's 13-hour cut-off time looms. A few runners arrive minutes late, hanging their heads and shouting apologies to their families.

Packed into a space the size of two tennis courts, the 60 tents look like soggy plastic bags. 'Rain fills up in the bottom here and drops fall on your face all night,' says Yusuke Hayashida while cooking noodles from his wet tent. 'It's not warm or relaxing and you don't really sleep. You just black out and lose consciousness.'

The King tries to move his tent to a drier spot, but even the King must sleep in a puddle.

At the next morning's 2am start, wind thrashes the treetops above the swarm of headlamps. Race director Hiroshi Iijima lines everyone up in the order they finished the day before, Mochizuki at the front, followed by Doi, who slept in his rain gear. 'You had some rain and wind last night,' he says. 'Doing that for five to eight days in the race wears on you. Try to train like that as much as you can.' He cautions the runners on the day's required river and potential snow crossings, and warns them not to take dangerous shortcuts. No aid stations, pacers or support of any kind are allowed. The runners all adjust their headlamps and proceed into the darkness with a 2.9-mile climb up 1,050m, then back down to a road for a 12-mile descent on pavement.

'You can't make it through the race just by being fast,' says Iijima, once the racers have departed. 'This race is completely self-supported, so if you injure yourself, you have to have the gear on you to deal with that problem. Some try to shave weight by carrying less food, clothes, or first aid kit, and they have to know what risk they're taking in this environment.'

I ask Iijima why the entry process is so strict and the requirements so extensive. 'First, I don't want them to die,' he says with a stoic face and measured voice. 'In the past, people have died training for this race from hypothermia and falling from cliffs while putting themselves in these harsh conditions. An athlete almost died in the race one year and someone from the mountain rescue team scolded me, so now I believe it's important that everyone is prepared.' ►

TOP: Shogo 'the King' Mochizuki assembles his tent **BOTTOM:** Takashi Doi looks on as a committee member tests his tent

His body felt fine, but he began to experience a psychological breakdown. 'I couldn't handle this type of fatigue,' he says

He even holds a training camp for those runners aspiring to enter the selection event.

And while the challenge is obviously attractive to some, I ask why someone who has finished or even won the race would keep coming back. Is the obsession to be part of this exclusive club? 'Definitely,' he chuckles. 'There are some who don't have friends outside of this.'

On the committee members' bus ride down from the campsite, we pass several of the runners spread out at various points along the course. A younger newcomer is surprising people, well ahead of the King. 'Tsuyoi,' says one of the members, meaning 'strong'.

We arrive at the finish line at 8am. Doi is already there, sitting cross-legged on the hot asphalt, taking his three-page written test. The wind is blowing a pop-up tent across the car park, but Doi is scratching his head and concentrating, calculating wind chill temperatures based on the wind speed and answering what percentage of the human body is blood.

In post-event interviews, Doi, like his fellow competitors, dodges questions about rivalry, competition, glory, records, goals, winning or anything that's not self-effacing. As a regular 100-mile racer, he didn't find the two-day event physically that hard, 'However, there is the pressure that comes from knowing that you cannot make a mistake in tests such as the tent set-up and map reading,' he says.

Even if a runner passes all the requirements – as Doi, Kimura and the King do on day two – when more than 30 applicants succeed, they're all put in a convoluted lottery that favours those who previously lost the drawing. Kimura also qualified for the last race with shining colours, but lost out on the lottery and had to wait two more years. 'I couldn't believe it, but I moved forwards motivated to get better,' he says.

➤➤➤

PASSING THE CROWN

LESS THAN TWO MONTHS LATER, IN EARLY AUGUST, TAKASHI DOI DETHRONES THE KING, setting a new course record by six hours – despite heavy rains – finishing in four days, 17 hours and 33 minutes. 'I found that I'm not immune to the effects of sleep deprivation, and the greatest challenge was getting the highest-quality sleep in the shortest amount of time,' he says. But the biggest struggle was his nutrition management. 'My calorie-dense, sports-specific foods spiked my blood sugar levels. That insulin shock contributed to sluggishness. That was my one mistake.' This fatigue hit Doi hardest as he was climbing to the summit of Mt Senjo, where the terrain and gradient are relatively constant, with very little change in scenery.

More than 24 hours behind Doi, the King takes fourth in a still impressive five days, 18 hours and 37 minutes. 'I thought about quitting three or so times,' he says. 'In the past, I had goals to win and break the course record. This time I told myself excuses such as, "I'm older now so I don't have the same stamina," or "My body just doesn't move like it used to."'

REQUIRED GEAR

☐ **2 LIGHTS**
Two headlamps, or one plus a handheld light. Full batteries plus spares.

☐ **MOBILE PHONE**
Waterproofed, with a spare battery; may be used for race navigation.

☐ **GPS TRACKING UNIT**
In a waterproof case with a spare battery.

☐ **MAPS FOR ENTIRE ROUTE**
Printed, inside a plastic bag.

☐ **COMPASS**

☐ **NOTEPAD AND PEN**
For race plan and checkpoint times.

☐ **MOUNTAINEERING REPORT**
Waterproof report of where you plan to be.

☐ **MOUNTAIN INSURANCE CARD**

☐ **HEALTH INSURANCE CARD**

☐ **DRIVER'S LICENCE**

☐ **3 RACE BIBS**
For the racer, their backpack and tent.

☐ **RAIN WEAR**
Separate top and bottom with sealed seams.

☐ **WARM CLOTHING**
Covering wrists and ankles, in addition to a rain suit.

☐ **HAT AND GLOVES**

☐ **TENT**
Shelter cannot be a bivvy.

☐ **SLEEPING BAG**
Or emergency blanket.

☐ **BEAR BELL**
For black bears.

☐ **1 LITRE OF WATER**
At the start, in multiple containers.

☐ **EMERGENCY RATIONS**

☐ **CLIMBING HELMET**
Used for the 15 miles with falling hazards but carried the whole time.

☐ **RED FLASHING LIGHTS**
For dark road sections without pavements.

☐ **FIRST AID KIT**

☐ **COOKING SET**
Gas, pot and lighter.

☐ **RUBBER CAPS**
If trekking poles are used.

☐ **COCOHELI EMERGENCY LOCATOR BEACON**

☐ **FACE MASK**

☐ **TWO PORTABLE TOILETS**

GREAT
NDURANCE
ANS JAPAN ALPS

THIS PAGE: (above) Competitors traverse a ridge in the 2022 TJAR; (right) Takashi Doi wins the 2022 race, setting a new course record **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Iijima briefs the runners before the 2am start on the second day of the selection event

But that's missing the point. Trans Japan itself is a sufficient challenge, and I'm happy to have crossed the finish line.'

This year, the King says he made a point of looking up at the mountains and stars, appreciating sunrises and sunsets, talking with friends and hikers along the way, and allowing himself to really enjoy the race. 'Each [interaction] has the power to reset a mind and body on the verge of breaking,' he says. At the beachfront finish line, under a stormy grey sky with waves pounding into the dark sand, he reflects to the crowd, nearly all of whom are filming, 'I thought that I would be able to close this chapter in peace now, and wasn't considering running Trans Japan again, but crossing the goal line now, I almost feel like I might want to try again. If I do, please be there to cheer me on.'

Ten of the 30 racers either dropped out or didn't finish within the eight-day limit, but Naomasa Kimura wasn't among those 10. 'It was the best experience in my life,' he says a month later, seated at his office desk, speaking quietly into his headset over Zoom. 'But it was really tough.' After breaking a trekking pole early in the Northern Alps on Hayatsuki Ridge, a trail that has one of the largest elevation differences in Japan, he still dropped the main pack and found himself running alone by the time he'd reached the Southern Alps.

His body felt fine, but somewhere on Senshio Ridge between Mt Yokokawa and Mt Mibu during day four, he began to experience a psychological breakdown. 'Mentally, I couldn't handle this special type of fatigue,' he says. 'In order to overcome it, I cheated my brain, believing that my brain was feeling the muscle pain, not me.' Once he began to see more people and spectators, their cheers and encouragement were a boon to his spirits. On the final approach from Hatanagi Dam to Ohama Beach, Kimura was 'able to run out all of my remaining power, thinking that I'd never be able to run again after the finish.'

Kimura shocked the field with a second place finish in five days, 14 hours and seven minutes – four and a half hours ahead of the King. Before the selection event, Kimura swore this was his last attempt at the Trans Japan Alps Race. 'The TJAR was my everything over the past three years, now my motivation is really low,' he says. 'I don't know what to do with myself all the time.'

One thing that's helped: his new-found brotherhood. Since finishing, he's camped, barbecued and gone out drinking with his fellow TJAR racers. 'It's like friends in arms,' he says. And now that he's inside the club, he may never be able to leave. RW

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: HAO MODA; SHO FUJIMAKI

FREEDOM OF

AFGANISTAN

MOVEMENT

How ultrarunner **Stephanie Case's** Free To Run programmes help to empower women where their freedoms are hardest won

WORDS: KATE CARTER

STEPHANIE CASE IS AN EXPLORER, A PIONEER OF DARK PLACES.

01

Places where her limits are tested so far that she genuinely doesn't know what might happen. The places that human beings make for each other through violence and war, where her skills as a human rights lawyer help bring a little light.

As a lawyer, she's worked in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Iraq. She's lived in tents in conflict zones and worn body armour to work. As an ultrarunner, her CV is a roll call of the very toughest: Hardrock 100, Western States 100, two Barkley Marathons and the 450km Tor des Glaciers among many more. Her character is perhaps summed up best in her reaction to finishing her first marathon. Like so many runners, it was an experience that changed her – just not how you might think.

'It seemed like the big, ultimate challenge,' she says. 'I felt like it would be a life-changing event. But I had a sense of accomplishment for maybe a day. Then it went away and I started to think, what was it about that experience that disappointed me? How can I improve this? What do I need to do next?'

She was studying at law school, working long hours, and running became her outlet. But the mere challenge of running against the clock did nothing for her. 'The thought of training for another year just to bring my marathon time down by 15 minutes sounded completely insane. Because I'm not going to go to the Olympics. I know I could finish the marathon. I know now the distance isn't that far. So what's the point of doing it faster? I just wasn't motivated by speed. So I started thinking about distance.'

Distance became her new frontier. 'It felt more primal to me,' she explains, 'more connected to who we are as human beings. What's the furthest we can go, when we can push our bodies to the absolute limit? When no matter what kind of external factors come our way, whether it's wind or snow or heat, you just have to keep going. To see how the body would be able to bear whatever unexpected event came along, I found that very exciting.'

Case was born in Ontario, Canada, and grew up in a suburb of Toronto. Was it a childhood spent running and taking part in competitive sports? She laughs at the very idea, 'I was a total nerd! I wasn't sporty at all. I was interested in maths and science, and in high school, I gave up half of my lunch hour so I could be in the wind ensemble. At university, I did join the rowing team and became a sailing instructor in the summers, but I've never really considered myself very sporty. I'm quite clumsy.'

Law school at the University of British Columbia – including summer stints for Lawyers Without Borders in Ethiopia, Rwanda and Liberia – led to a high-flying job as a mergers and acquisitions lawyer in New York, though she continued to do pro bono humanitarian work. In 2011, she earned a master's in international human rights and humanitarian law, then in 2012, a posting for the UN in Afghanistan.

'THESE ARE WOMEN WITH NO SAFE PLACE TO GO'

Through all of this, she kept running. But if running was a coping mechanism for the difficult conditions in which she worked, Afghanistan offered serious challenges. 'Everyone said, "You're going to have to quit your running, it's going to be impossible – you can't run in a war zone,"' she recalls. 'But living in an armed compound, I could run loops.' With considerable understatement she admits, 'It wasn't very nice.' Most runners faced with training for an ultra by lapping the 800m perimeter of an armed compound would quit. Then you can add in appalling air quality – one report suggested that as many Afghans died from the effects of air pollution in 2012 as from the armed conflict. But Case doesn't give up. Besides, she felt luckier than most. 'I had so many more freedoms in my running than many of the Afghan women I was meeting who were living outside the compound walls.'

By then, she had already started raising money for a local women's shelter. 'These are women who have had to run away from their husbands, their families, fleeing domestic violence – and who had no safe place to go,' says Case. 'Not only are they living in a war zone, they're not even safe within their own families.'

Talking to them challenged some of her own assumptions. 'I'd just thought that maybe running was more of a western thing – that it wasn't necessarily something that people living in a war zone, in a shelter, would be interested in,' she admits. 'But they were so keen to experience that kind of freedom of movement.'

She talked to other organisations to see if there was a way to create more sports programmes for women. What she found wasn't inspiring: the odd annual volleyball tournament, or other ad hoc indoor, out-of-sight activities. 'The idea of helping

02

01/ Free to Run offers Afghan women a chance to exercise outside in a country where that's often not an option for them.
02/ Case turned to ultrarunning after she completed a marathon and realised the distance 'isn't that far'

to create spaces for Afghan women to run outdoors seemed a crazy idea to most,' she explains. You feel, given the context, that they may have had a point. But Case decided that if existing structures didn't provide, then she would make new ones. 'Starting an NGO wasn't something I really wanted to do,' she recalls. 'But I felt it would be quite arrogant of me to listen to what Afghan women wanted and then ignore it. So, if they wanted this chance to be able to run outdoors, I figured there had to be some way we could make that happen.'

BREAKING FREE

And so Free to Run was born. It started with a small hiking camp in the Bamiyan region of central Afghanistan. 'We had a dozen women – women who were educated, so they had certain privileges that many living in more rural areas might not have had, but they'd never been hiking into the mountains that surrounded where they lived. So after the first day, I wasn't sure anyone would come back.'

But come back they did, with enthusiasm. 'It was amazing to see these women witnessing their own lives from a different perspective,' says Case. 'To be on a mountain looking down at their villages, at these roads they had walked along their whole lives. They'd just never had that chance to see it from above. Free to Run really grew from there.'

The key to Free to Run's success was to work within communities, not to challenge and antagonise them. Case points out that even women who she worked with at the UN would come to work fully covered in a burqa, and here she was running with women in the mountains. 'To be able to do that, and to create the support for that from the families of the women involved, was just absolutely unheard of when we started. It really was because of the model that we have of working with the families and communities, so it isn't something that's imposed. Some parents agree for their daughters to join and some are hesitant, but they will see the daughters of friends go through the programme and develop this confidence, and actually be more helpful and energetic when they're at home. That's usually what convinces them.'

Allowing these women the freedom to run was, and is, more than simply about encouraging healthy exercise. More, even, than giving them precious moments of individual freedom. It's about visibility and empowerment. 'When people see women running through the streets, moving through space in a powerful way, it changes the ideas they have about the roles they should be playing in broader society,' Case explains. 'The more visible women are in public ►

spaces, the harder it becomes to deny their rights. That's why that outdoor aspect is fundamental to what Free to Run does. This was really a fundamental shift.'

But in a country where women's rights were still severely curtailed, how could the organisation measure success? First, in the growth of the programme, says Case. From one hiking camp with 12 women, Free to Run expanded to working across five provinces – including Qandahar, the Taliban stronghold.

'In the Afghanistan marathon, the first year, I ran alongside the only Afghan woman to run the full distance,' says Case. 'The next year, there were six, then 12, and then we got up to dozens. One year I ran with two girls – one I think was 15 and had lied about her age – who went the distance in sparkly jeggings.'

In Afghanistan, Case explains, there's constant pressure, particularly in poor families, to marry girls off early. By changing the dynamics within families, within communities, Free to Run was even able to prevent child marriages. 'In all the monitoring and evaluation we'd set up, you'd see it in the numbers,' she recalls. 'Not only from the women and girls who were involved, but also from the family members involved. How they viewed the women and the girls and their abilities. That's what we saw over the years.'

FORWARDS AND BACK

For those of us to whom the sight of runners is commonplace, it's hard to imagine what it must look like the first time a woman runs through your village or town. You'd assume, perhaps, that the reaction would be hostile, the atmosphere volatile, even dangerous. 'To see a foreigner running through the mountains is such a weird thing, everyone is almost too shocked to do anything about it,' says Case. 'But you fall into a different category as an international woman, you're not judged in the same way. For me, there would never be any family repercussions. So my focus was always on making sure that the women I was with felt safe.'

'But in the over eight years we've been operating, we've never had a major security threat, and I think it also speaks to the success of the model. To be able to do something that seems so rebellious, almost like a protest against the repression of women, and to be able to operate successfully without really angering anyone or pulling on the threads… It meant that we were getting somewhere.'

'IT'S HARD FOR MEN TO BULLY WOMEN IN A PACK'

Sometimes, men would cheer the women. Sometimes they would yell abuse. 'When one woman was training on her own, someone called her a prostitute,' recalls Case. 'This idea that proper Islamic women shouldn't be doing activities like running – I think that's a difficult insult for a woman to take because it makes them feel they're doing something improper. But I think it's harder for men to bully women in a pack.'

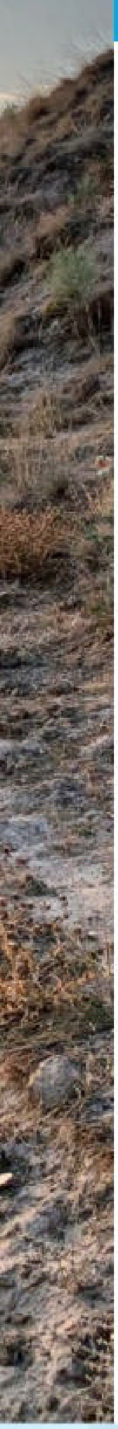
Case recalls her final run in Afghanistan, in July 2021. 'I went out around this lake in quite a conservative area and some young men yelled out to us, wished us long life and gave us a very happy greeting. But then someone else said, "You'd better stop this, the Taliban is coming. You're not going to be allowed to do anything."'

Sadly, they were right.

In August 2021, US President Joe Biden announced all US troops would withdraw from Afghanistan and, soon after, the Taliban took over. For anyone who worked for human rights in the country, it was an incredibly

03/ A Free to Run expedition in July 2021, shortly before the Taliban takeover made operations much more difficult.

04/ Races enhance the visibility of the runners, shifting the perception of what women are capable of



awful time. For the women and girls of Afghanistan it was, and remains, far worse.

'It was the darkest day in the lives of so many Afghan women and girls,' says Case. 'It's everything we've feared. A reversal of women's rights and the space that women had to go to school, to go to work – to be able to go outside of their homes without being completely covered up, with a male chaperone. You just feel angry.'

It's a dark time, but Free to Run has refused to relinquish hope. It has expanded into other areas – Iraq is now its flagship programme, working both with internally displaced people and also refugees from Syria – but Afghanistan remains central. 'I feel very strongly that now is not the time to abandon the women and girls there,' says Case. 'We were able to evacuate our programme staff and the family members who were willing to take that chance, but we have hundreds of alumni still there.'

'To go from running a marathon outdoors to now not having any kind of hope for their future – it's unthinkable. So, to the extent that we can continue in a quiet, underground and safe way, we will. We did what we always do – consult with the women we're supporting and ask them what do they want us to do. And it was very clear – they said the support has to continue.'

'It might not be an outdoor protest of visibility, but it's a way that we can maintain a lifeline, so they have some form of ability to deal with trauma, to build their own resilience and to maintain a network with each other. So I haven't lost hope. I'll never lose hope for Afghanistan. But it's looking pretty dire.'

THE HEALING PATH

Case speaks to us from Chamonix, France, her permanent home, though placings have taken her all over the world. And she's there to heal herself a little. She recently endured a miscarriage and talks about how society's failure to be open about this adds to the pain. On Instagram, she has written, 'We tell the world when our dog has died, when our parent has passed away or our kid is sick. But we keep silent when that pre-12-week baby doesn't make it.'

As always, she sees the bigger picture. This isn't just about her personal loss – her work lies in advocating for women and fighting discrimination. For her, this is part of that picture: allowing proper

'I GREW UP IN FREE TO RUN. I LEARNED EVERYTHING THERE'

Hasina joined Free to Run in 2016, aged 20, with zero running experience. In 2018, she became part of the first Afghan women's team to officially complete an international ultramarathon. In August 2021, after the Taliban takeover, she was evacuated to Canada, where she's now studying.

'In 2016, one of my friends sent me a message on Facebook about an organisation working with women and girls, organising a trip to the mountains. I didn't even ask the organisation's name, I just said, "Yes!"

I had problems getting permission from my family, because I wasn't allowed to travel alone. Eventually, my father said okay, but when I came back he didn't talk to me for a week. But I went, and I met Stephanie and girls from other provinces, and we did a seven-day hiking tour. I'd never done anything like it before - it was so much fun and I made friends. When Free to Run asked if I'd like to join the team, I had no idea what sort of team they meant, but I said yes because I loved that trip.

At first, we had to run around and around a tiny yard. That was tough. But then they found a better route and day by day we were able to run more and more. In 2017, I did the Afghanistan marathon. I was sad, because the programme had finished for me and I didn't want to go back to normal life. So when I was offered a chance to do an ultramarathon in 2018, I was so excited. It was tough - hot, rocky, we had heavy backpacks... I cried a lot. After that, again it felt like the journey had ended and I'd have to go back to normal life. Then I heard Free to Run was recruiting and I applied, eventually becoming a programme officer. I grew up in Free to Run and found my freedom. Before that, I didn't really have freedom in my family. We couldn't go outside without older people, so I just didn't go out. And it's not just physically that I built myself, but mentally and emotionally as well. I grew up in Free to Run, because I learned everything there.' ▶

‘GIRLS SHOULD BE ABLE TO FOLLOW THEIR DREAMS’

Fatima was born in Iran in 1991 and her family moved to Afghanistan in 2003. She always loved running and, thanks to a supportive family, was able to compete in the 400m on the Afghanistan national team from 2014 to 2016. She discovered Free to Run in 2016.

‘I was a 400m sprinter, but due to problems and corruption, I left the [Afghanistan] Federation and joined Free to Run as a community development leader, and I started to run marathons. I went from sprinting to running 100km – it was very tough! That was just in a compound, running in circles, 1,300 of them! We did it for charity, to raise money.

With Free to Run, we were working with girls who had never run before, and never had opportunities like this. We would teach them leadership and other physical practices, such as yoga. Running for these girls is very hard, because you need an open area to run, which was just not possible in Afghanistan. But Free to Run provided that opportunity. And we had girls who had no experience of running at all who would go on to do the marathon. That was such a huge change, and it was really amazing to see this improvement. To see how proud of themselves they were. The programme made such a big positive effect, it gave the girls skills and also self-confidence.

Girls should be able to follow their dreams. They should be able to do sport if they want to, wherever they want to, without harassment. Everyone should be able to follow their dreams.’

05

pregnancy deferrals in races and helping female athletes to plan ahead where possible.

Unfortunately, this has left her without an epic race to look forward to at a time when she probably needs a challenge to help her process it all. When asked to look back on her most memorable race, she names the Tor des Glaciers. The longest of the Tor des Géants races, it covers 450km of northern Italy’s Aosta valley. Runners must self-guide over mountain peaks, with 32,000m of climbing. In 2021, she finished in 155 hours, six minutes – an astonishing 30 hours ahead of the previous women’s course record.

‘For me, that’s the pinnacle because I’m motivated by this question of how far can someone take it?’ explains Case. ‘It’s my proudest accomplishment. It’s not necessarily my best, but the ability to continuously move for six and a half days, in a state of almost drunken tiredness… To have your wits about you enough to

05/ Case in Colorado, US, with two Free to Run alumni, Zahra and Zeinab.
06/ For Case, ultrarunning is a ‘primal’ urge.
07/ Under Taliban rule, Free to Run has gone underground, but Case will never lose hope for Afghanistan

06

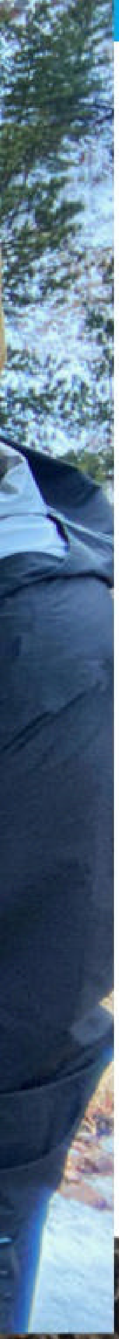
PHOTOGRAPHY: TYLER TOMASELLO; THE NORTH FACE

FREE TO RUN BY THE NUMBERS

4,000
Since 2014, Free to Run has reached approximately 4,000 women and girls in areas of conflict

5
Countries the group has operated in across the Middle East, Africa and Asia

80%
of participants see themselves as ‘equal to boys’ after a year in the programme, compared with just 50% at the start



07

be able to read a GPS, figure out where you need to go. I was so self-reliant.'

And then she says the most extraordinary thing, 'When I crossed the finish line, I didn't feel that I was done. I'd spent six and a half days forcing myself not to think about the finish line. So then when the finish line suddenly came up, I wasn't ready. I wanted to keep exploring.' It summarises her attitude so well: you feel there's no race that will ever be off limits, no course too wild. 'Our best races are the ones that leave us with this sense that there's something else waiting for us,' she says.

Case has had a couple of cracks at the infamous Barkley Marathons, but it's not a race she longs to return to. 'The first time, I ran with a friend and we helped each other navigate, so in a sense it didn't feel like I'd done it, because the Barkley is all about being out alone in the woods with no safety net,' says Case. 'The second year, I did all the navigation myself. I had a couple of people following me, and that felt really powerful. When I finished, I knew it was probably the best I could do, so I didn't have that unfinished feeling. I've got what I needed out of it.'

So if not conquering the Barkley, what is in her plans for the future? She says she would love to do the Tor des Glaciers again and, though she's not motivated by time, maybe break the course record again by a mere '20 hours or so', finishing with the top men. 'I think I'm unfinished in that landscape,' she says.

It is, however, a landscape that nearly finished her. On New Year's Day 2017, on a solo hike in the Aosta valley, she fell 35m, crashing into a tree and breaking six ribs, puncturing a lung, lacerating her liver and soon developing severe hypothermia. She managed to call a friend and send the GPS coordinates on her watch, and a helicopter arrived 25 minutes later. A few more, and it would surely have have been too late. It's the kind of near-fatal accident that would lead many to reassess, perhaps back off. Case does not think that way. 'That year, I think I was so obsessed about trying to prove to myself that the accident hadn't held me back that I pushed myself way harder,' she says. 'I was out running with six broken ribs just three and a half weeks after the accident. I'd only been out of the hospital a few days. I did six major ultramarathons that year.'

This extreme version of the 'get back on the bike' axiom worked for her. 'I think if you go through something traumatic, the longer that you let it sit without confronting it head on, the more it holds this power over you,' she says. 'And I feel the same way about a lot of the things that I see through my human rights work. And it's why I run: if I didn't deal with some of the stories, with the emotions that come with the secondary trauma of listening to what people have gone through, then I'm sure I would have burned out in this line of work a long time ago. I force myself to deal with it when I'm running. When I get on the trails, I just allow my brain to unlock all of those things that I've stored away and release them – and leave it on the trail behind me.' RW

freetorun.org

100%
of participants reported feeling capable of making decisions about their own lives at the end of the programme

80%
of participants reported achieving their goal by the end of the programme

70%
of Free to Run alumni parents/caregivers think their daughter is capable of making her own decisions

633
In 2020, Free to Run ran 633 sports sessions and 479 education sessions for 358 participants

5
Before the Taliban took over, Free to Run was operating in five Afghan provinces

50%
of participants saw an improvement in social wellbeing scores and reported worrying less about events in life

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COACH

REACH *your* PERSONAL BEST

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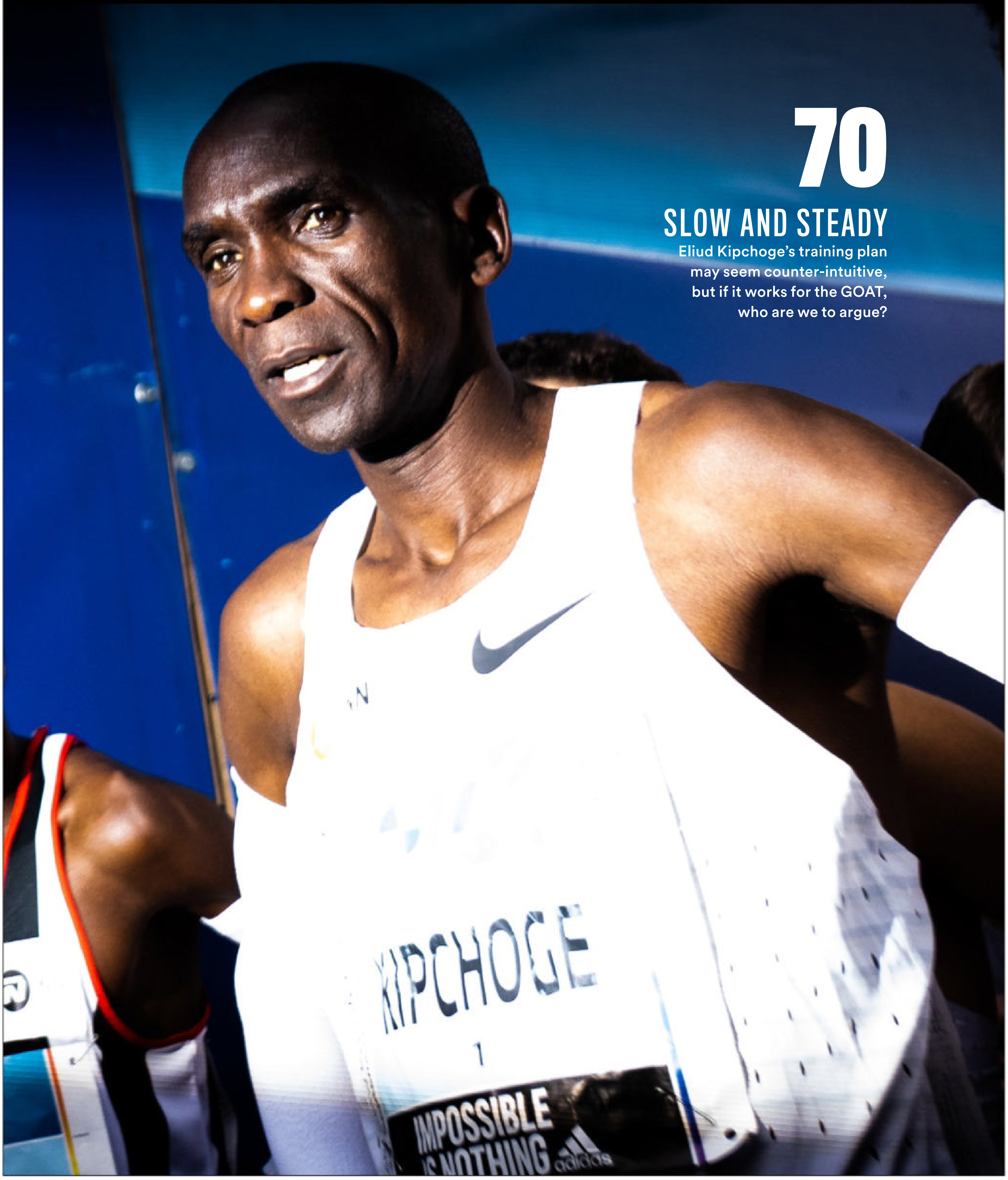

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SLOW AND STEADY

Eliud Kipchoge's training plan may seem counter-intuitive, but if it works for the GOAT, who are we to argue?

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES. ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIELLE DALY. FOOD STYLING: SIMON ANDREWS

HOP TO IT
Warm up well and reap the rewards

THE LOW-DOWN ON THE WARM-UP

Many runners skip it, but prepping your body properly before a race has many benefits

IN A TIME-POOR WORLD, we often cram our running around lots of other things. As a result, we strip away some of the most important elements of physical preparation, and one of the most obvious areas is the warm-up and cool-down. Here, I'll explain how they can enhance your performance.

● The warm-up – what's the point?

Do you have a warm-up that's well planned and repeatable? Or is it, at best, an afterthought, or at worst, skipped altogether? Having a clear understanding of what a good warm-up can do for you might help persuade you that it's worth devoting time to. A proper warm-up can help:

Increase body temperature: As your body temperature and mobility increases, synovial fluid is released to help your joints move more freely. There is increased enzyme activity in your muscles, which can improve their ability to contract, and at the same time, your heart rate will rise, which will help improve blood flow.

Improve flexibility: You can increase the range of movement around your joints, increase the reactivity and stiffness of your tendons and also increase the force and coordination your muscles can produce, allowing you to run better and faster.

Raise mental readiness: An effective, repeatable warm-up may also involve psychological techniques to enhance performance. This includes positive self-talk, visualisation and mental rehearsals. A good warm-up could also help to temporarily increase testosterone levels.

Boost performance: Combined, these factors suggest that warming up plays an important role in your performance immediately before you train or complete a race.

The bigger picture: Do you also struggle to carry out regular strength work? A well-structured warm-up provides a regular opportunity to add to your conditioning with drills, body-weight exercises, strides and banded exercises, which all improve your running over the longer term.

● Going the distance

All distances require different kinds of warm-ups. With marathons, energy preservation is a primary concern, so care is needed not to overdo it. Just a few minutes of light jogging and some dynamic stretching is enough. The warm-up is as much mental as physical: it's about making you feel relaxed. For shorter races, we want to get out of the blocks strongly. Oxygen uptake kinetics refers to the time it takes for your body to reach its peak oxygen uptake during exercise. A good warm-up at the right intensity can improve oxygen uptake by increasing blood flow, muscle temperature and heart rate. This helps the body to transport oxygen more efficiently to your muscles. I often see runners prepping for a 5K or interval session with a few minutes of easy jogging and some strides, but then struggling to ease into the race. I advocate a warm-up at a higher intensity to help with oxygen kinetics. Simply put, in a shorter race we don't want to be using the first

PERSONAL BEST

COACHING TIPS TO HELP YOU RAISE YOUR RUNNING GAME

BY TOM CRAGGS

section as a warm-up, we want our body to be primed right from the gun.

● Get dynamic

All runners have different needs. What your body requires from a warm-up as an 18-year-old 1500m runner is likely to be a little different from what you might need running half marathons in your seventies. As such, I'm cautious to avoid hard and fast rules around stretching. Some runners might feel the need, or may have been advised by a medical professional to do static stretching, which involves holding a muscle in a stretched pose for a set period of time, usually 15 to 45 seconds. In general terms, though, static stretching is not advised before running because it may temporarily reduce muscle strength and power, which could negatively impact your performance. Instead, dynamic stretching may be a more effective option. It involves moving the body through a range of motions while stretching. This is thought to activate the central nervous system, increase blood flow and muscle temperature – and, unlike static stretching, dynamic exercises can help maintain the pop and stiffness in your tendons, which can improve running economy.

> **DISTANCES REQUIRE DIFFERENT KINDS OF WARM-UPS**

● RAMP it up

The Raise, Activate, Mobilise, Potentiate (RAMP) protocol was developed by Dr Ian Jeffreys and is a useful tool for developing a warm-up that fully prepares your body. The following steps don't necessarily have to be completed in this order. So decide what's most important for you and develop your own. One of the key benefits is that it's repeatable, which can help with your mental priming:

Raise: This is about increasing your body temperature and heart rate. Of course, an effective way to do this is by running. But there's no reason why you can't add variation with speed ladders or mini hurdles as well. For shorter events, I would look to start off with an easy run or a walk and gradually build the intensity over the course of 10 to 15 minutes, finishing with a strong two- to three-word answer effort for a couple of minutes. Aim to finish this about 10 to 15 minutes before the start of your run.

Activate: The goal here is to engage key running muscle groups. You can use body-weight exercises such as walking lunges, sumo squats and calf raises – I find using a looped physio band to do side-stepping, knee lifts and step-back exercises very effective.

Mobilise: This is all about ensuring you have the right range of movement around your joints to perform. Focus on dynamic movements rather than static stretching, which can decrease muscle tension and elastic storage, therefore inhibiting performance.

Potentiate: Potentiation is all about getting neurons primed for quick movement to allow them to fire your muscles faster. This phase involves more powerful plyometric (jumping) movements such as A- and B-skip drills. Consider following these with several sets of strides over 60m to 80m or so. These are about running at a relaxed faster speed, just off 800m to 1500m pace. You might need to think creatively if you have limited space in a starting pen in a mass race, but many of these exercises can be undertaken on the spot if needed.

● The cool-down

There is limited scientific evidence to support the idea that a cool-down can reduce the risk of injury in runners. However, it may help lower cortisol levels by reducing stress, promoting relaxation and a faster recovery. A 10 to 15 minute run, perhaps slowing to a walk, is a good way to gradually lower your heart rate towards its resting state. If you're going to do static stretching, now is a good time as your muscles will still be warm, reducing injury risk. So the main purpose of your cool-down is to ease you from a catabolic state towards an anabolic state, where fitness will build.

Tom Craggs is a coach and road running manager for England Athletics

SAMPLE 5K WARM-UP

1 / RAISE

For 15 mins, building gradually in five-minute blocks to finish at two- to three-word answer effort. Finish this about 15 minutes before the race starts.

2 / ACTIVATE

With a looped physio band around your feet or ankles, complete a clock face of stepping directly forwards, diagonally forwards, to the side, diagonally backwards then straight backwards. Repeat on your other leg.

3 / MOBILISE

Complete two sets of walking knee hugs, hamstring sweeps and calf pumps for about 20 to 30 seconds.

4 / POTENTIATE

Add a handful of higher-intensity drills such as straight-leg kick-outs, A-skips and high knees, followed by 2×60m at 1500m effort and 2×200m at 5K effort.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

THE WINNING FORMULA

THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF SUCCESSFUL RUNNERS

BY JO PAVEY

LESSON 1

Resourcefulness and flexibility

Maximising limited training time after giving birth led to one of my best race results

MY LIFE LEADING up to the 10,000m at the 2014 European Championships was a far cry from the elite athlete lifestyle I'd lived at times during my career. I used to go to overseas camps to prepare for competitions and had lots of time to focus on training and recovery. But I was then 40 and a busy mum of two, having had our second child, Emily, in September 2013 after our son Jacob was born in 2009.

I was immensely happy; I wanted to treasure this special time and not rush things. But as far as my career was concerned, I had to learn to be resourceful and flexible. Prioritising the most important parts of training became key to maximising my time.

First, we invested in a treadmill. I'd had a caesarean, which delayed my return to running, so at first, I did power-walking sessions on a steep incline for a good aerobic workout.

The treadmill allowed me to run at any time – and as Emily wouldn't take a bottle, it was good to be able to run without leaving the house. We kept it in a small shoe room and people who saw it complimented me on my motivation to train in a cupboard! It was unbearably hot in there; I think the heat actually boosted my fitness.

Other runs involved us going to trails as a family. I would run back and forth, keeping close to the pram being pushed by my husband Gav, while Jacob zoomed around on his bike. Track workouts became a bit of an undertaking as our local circuit was closed for resurfacing, so those sessions involved a family trip to one an hour's drive away. We made it fun, though, taking a picnic, and my cool-down included playing on the pirate ship with Jacob in the park next to the track.

Generally, my training became much more flexible. I took easy days when necessary, particularly after a bad night's sleep. It also helped that my husband was my coach, as he knew first-hand the demands of family life.

My first aim was to compete in the trials to win selection for the Europeans. We knew I wouldn't be competitive unless I could achieve certain target times at the track. So we focused on recovering for the next track workout, with adequate rest or easy days in between, and put less emphasis on sessions that would affect my ability to achieve those times.

Sometimes, we decided I'd do an unmeasured workout in cushioned shoes in the outer lanes, so that I could keep progressing with quality work while reducing injury risk. We were up against it, time-wise, because the 10,000m trial was early in May, but I wasn't stressed, as I took the attitude that I could only do what I could do. I actually found it beneficial in many ways to worry less about how the training was going than I might have done in previous years.

We thought that I might have an outside chance of making the team, but medals were not expected. As it turned out, I won the trials, and went on to win 5000m bronze in the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in August. And then, 10 days later, to my huge surprise, I won 10,000m gold at the European Championships in Zurich, probably my most notable race after many years of running.

It taught me that having a happy balance in life and running could lead to achieving things that at first maybe seemed too difficult.

FLEXIBLE RETURNS
No matter where you are, fill in the gaps of your day with a training run

HOW TO ADAPT YOUR TRAINING

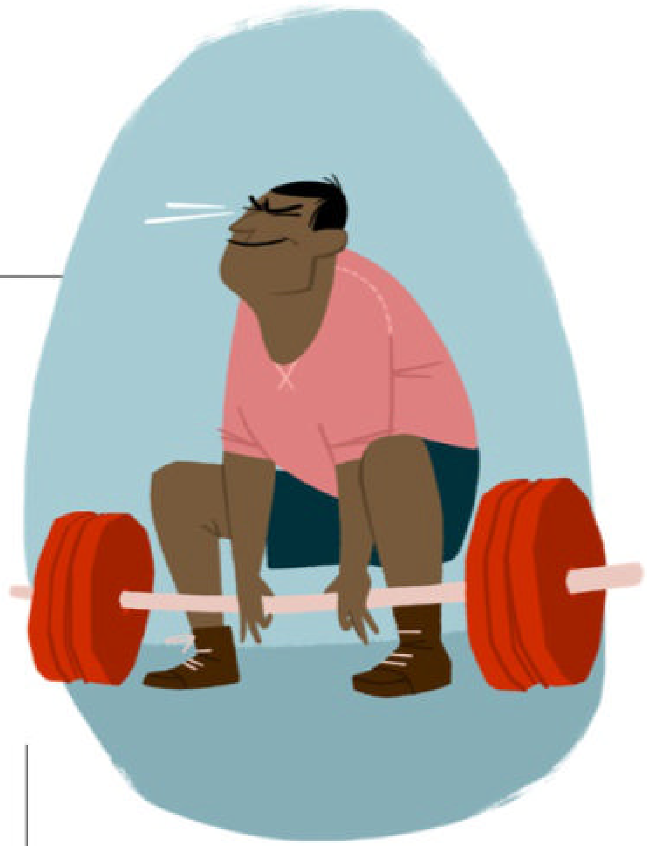
The key is to find solutions – don't look for obstacles. Most of us have fitted in lunchtime runs or jogged to work. Sometimes, you need to make the best use of a small window of time with a short tempo. I made my first senior debut at the World Championships in 1997, soon after backpacking around the world. I did quality workouts when possible, and many runs doubled as sightseeing trips. Once, walking through a park in Sydney, I did a few intervals before going home. Another time, I did a hill session on the side of an inactive volcano. Sometimes, I did strength and conditioning using logs and rocks in the forest.

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES. ILLUSTRATION: PIETARI POSTI

RHYTHM & GRIT

A FRESH TAKE ON MAXIMISING YOUR RUNNING ENJOYMENT

BY CORY WHARTON-MALCOLM



CROSS PURPOSES

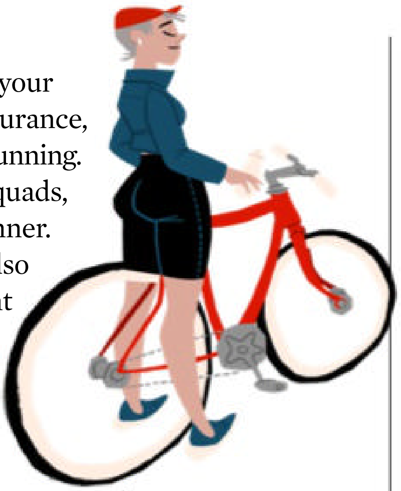
Why mixing up your training routine can make you a better runner

REGARDLESS OF HOW MUCH I LOVE RUNNING, doing the same thing over and over again can get a little repetitive, so spicing things up with cross training injects a little extra energy and excitement into my routine. And it can do the same for you. Doing exercises or workouts other than running is beneficial – for variety, fun and a new challenge. Cross training can help to correct imbalances in your body, build strength, strengthen your core muscles, and improve flexibility and mobility. All of this supports your growth as a stronger, well-rounded athlete. And yes, you are an athlete.

Here are a few of my go-to alternative activities that I find satisfaction and enjoyment in. All of them complement my running and can be sprinkled into your training when you feel like it. You may even want to do some of these activities before or after a run.

01 Yoga and Pilates

Improving your posture, balance and core strength, while also working on your range of motion, flexibility and breathing – all integral to running. Greater mobility and flexibility loosens up the body, giving you more freedom to move and fewer injuries. Breath work can also calm your mind when the going gets tough; I do this before or after a run, as well as on my rest days.



02 Cycling

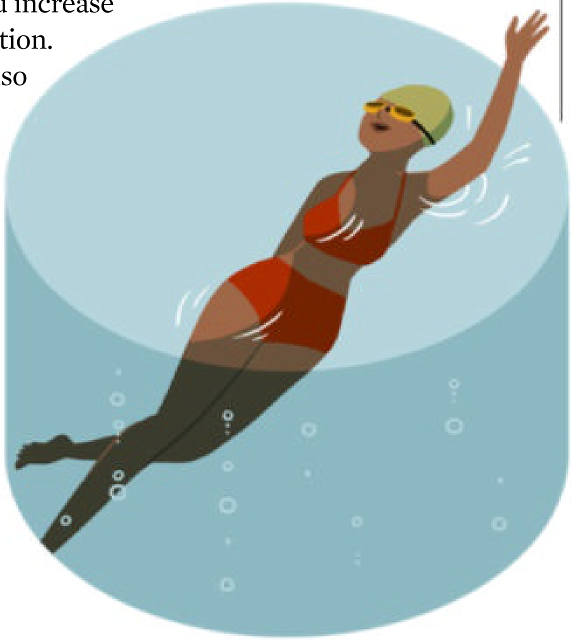
This can help to improve your overall fitness, stamina and endurance, but without the high impact of running. Cycling builds your glutes and quads, making you a more efficient runner. At a low intensity, cycling can also aid with recovery. You may want to work on strength by doing things like hill sprints or quick bursts in a high gear.

03 Indoor rowing

This is a full-body workout that burns serious calories, building strength in your legs, hips, core and arms, as well as improving coordination and mobility. Rowing is a combination of low-impact strength and cardio, perfect for active recovery and building up your endurance. Like most runners, you can always do with exercises that strengthen your glutes. Rowing does that with every stroke.

04 Swimming

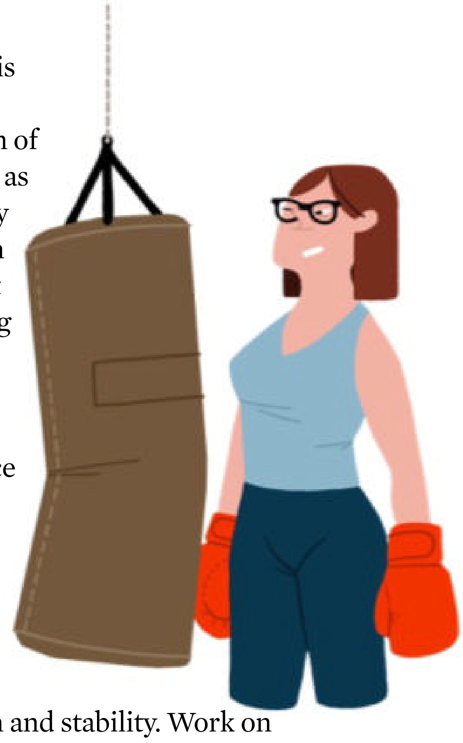
Swimming is my nemesis, but it strengthens the muscles that are underutilised when running. This can help to improve imbalances in the body and protect you from injury. It works your upper body, which can help with the arm drive and increase your range of motion. Swimming can also improve your lung capacity. But if you're not keen, you could try aqua jogging, as it replicates the running movement without the impact on your knees.



Cory is a running coach and founder of Track Mafia running. Instagram: @bitbeefy, @trackmafia_

05 Strength training

This can help the body deal with the impact of running. It improves your running economy, helping you become a more efficient and stronger runner. Strength exercises can bring greater power to your legs and assist your arm-drive movement, as well as balance, posture and coordination.



06 Boxing

Boxing is probably my favourite form of cross training as it's completely different from running but it has everything you need. Bouncing around in the fighter's stance helps to build muscles in your calves and quads. All the core work helps to build strength and stability. Work on the speed bag or heavy bag improves your coordination and power as well – all helping your overall stamina. Boxing, rowing and cycling are my go-tos when I'm getting race-ready.

07 Elliptical cross trainer

This beautiful piece of kit, which can be found in most gyms, mimics the mechanics of running, but with none of the impact. It's great as a warm-up tool, especially for those just getting into running or coming back from an injury.

ILLUSTRATION: ADAM NICKEL

LONG GAME Marathon king Eliud Kipchoge (centre) goes slow to go fast

HOW TO TRAIN LIKE KIPCHOGE

To race as fast as the world's quickest, practise slowly, says sports scientist Ross Tucker

ELIUD KIPCHOGE IS THE GREATEST MARATHON RUNNER EVER to lace up a pair of carbon-fibre shoes (or ordinary shoes, for that matter). Multiple big-city marathon wins, two Olympic Games gold medals, first man under two hours for the distance (albeit in a staged, non-eligible event), and the current men's marathon world record-holder. This is a marathon runner who knows how to train. So when research came out that documented Kipchoge's training, many readers were fascinated, searching painstakingly for the magic formula that makes him the greatest.

Back to basics

Those readers may have been disappointed. First, there are no secrets. Second, you'd be ill-advised to mimic the specific content of Kipchoge's training, given that he's running 200 to 220km a week – a volume few other humans could get away with. However, we can look behind Kipchoge's numbers and identify a couple of key principles that, when applied to our own training, may make us better runners.

For me, the first thing that jumped out was how relatively 'boring' Kipchoge's training is. There is a monotony; an abundance of what we might describe as 'staple' runs. He just runs, and accumulates hours and hours of low-intensity training.

Such repetition goes hand in hand with the second key principle: don't overdo it. Especially the intensity elements of training. Kipchoge racks up 13 sessions a week, two a day every day except for Sunday, when he takes the afternoon off. But of those 13, 10 are slow, easy runs – so slow that many club runners would be able to tag along; they range between 4:00 and 5:00 per kilometre [6:26 to 8:03 minutes per mile].

IN THE ZONES

Identify your intensity, whether you're the next Kipchoge or the first you

Managing training intensity is all about understanding how to identify when you're moving from a purely aerobic and manageable training zone into a zone close to your physiological thresholds, and then beyond this into severe exercise. Physiologists have very precise definitions for these boundaries, and various tests can be done and measurements taken to identify what yours are. But such tests are beyond most people – and honestly, they're unnecessary, given the range of possible training paces. So instead of being bogged down in the swamp of percentages of VO_2 max, heart rates and lactate thresholds, here's a far simpler way to manage your Kipchoge-like training:

● ZONE 1

If you're able to hold a conversation in full sentences, without having to interrupt yourself every few words to take a breath, then you're in zone 1 – easy training.

● ZONE 2

If you can talk, but only in broken sentences, you're in that middle-threshold zone, zone 2. (A rule of thumb to follow is '10 syllables' – if you can't get those out before needing to breathe, then you're no longer doing a zone 1 run.)

● ZONE 3

And then there's zone 3, where talking is impossible – and who cares, because the whole point of zone 3 is maximum effort. Save your conversations and stories for the finish!

PHOTOGRAPHY: JASON SUAREZ

> HE ACCUMULATES HOURS OF LOW-INTENSITY TRAINING

Which is still quite lively, bearing in mind he's doing this in Eldoret, at 2,000m above sea level. But compare that to his marathon pace of 2:52 per km [4:36 per mile], and you'll appreciate just how easy those runs are.

What this means is that Kipchoge gets better at running fast mostly by running slowly. There's physiology behind this – low-intensity training, well within what we call the aerobic training zone, drives adaptations that make us better at endurance running, even when our goal is higher intensity.

The mistake many runners make when they're aiming to improve is to push too hard too often, as well as not spending enough time in the easiest training zones.

Broadly and most simply, we can divide training into three zones. At the lower end is zone 1, easy training – and at the other end of the spectrum is zone 3 training, which is what physiologists describe as 'severe'; once you enter this zone, fatigue is inevitable – it's a matter of time before the effort becomes too much, and you're forced to slow down or stop. Think of how you feel during a 5km time trial, or hard intervals. That's zone 3.

In between these is zone 2. This is what we'd call 'heavy', but it's also manageable. You'll feel like you're working, and that if you picked the pace up slightly, you'd cross a threshold into zone 3, where the proverbial bear will jump on your back. But you're still in control, and you could speed up if you wanted to. You'll often read about 'threshold pace' and 'tempo runs' – they fall into this middle zone. See 'In The Zones', on the left, for more information on recommended training zones and how to know when you're hitting each of them.

● Slow and certain

So the way elites train teaches us that, in fact, we should be spending relatively little time at high intensity. Kipchoge, for instance, spends 85% of his training in zone 1, and only 15% across zones 2 and 3.

This is a pattern you'll see in the schedules of almost all the top performers. The trap that many of us fall into is to allow zone 1 training to drift up into zone 2. And I must emphasise, this can happen quite easily – push a little harder on a hill, hold that effort over the top, and suddenly a session that was meant to be an easy recovery day in zone 1 becomes a moderate day spent half in zone 1 and half in zone 2.

Or maybe you're finishing an easy 8km run, but you feel good; so, 3km from home, you lift the pace just a little, until you finish at around your 10K pace. Over time, these efforts accumulate, and your training takes on a 60/30/10 pattern rather than the 85/10/5 of Kipchoge and many other elites.

So what, you say? Well, the problem is that this compromises recovery. If we're always edging into zone 2, we get too few days of appropriate aerobic stress. We risk injury and burnout, and dilute our high-intensity efforts – those days when we actually want to push harder – because we're that little bit fatigued from what was meant to be an easy recovery day but became something tougher.

That's why Kipchoge spends a lot of his time at a relatively pedestrian 4:30 to 5:00 per km – it frees him up to really give his hard sessions a proper go. He does those only twice a week: a track session on a Tuesday, and an unstructured fartlek session on a Saturday. There's a long run on Thursdays that builds to a fast finishing pace, but everything else is very, very easy.

For practical reasons, we don't need to completely match Kipchoge's 85/10/5. Given that we might run 50km a week and he runs 200, we don't suffer the same volume-related stress, so we can afford a little more than 15% higher-intensity training.

For instance, if you were to do two hard sessions (track, hills, 5km time trial) a week, you could quite easily log 10 to 15km in zones 2 and 3, which would equate to about 20 to 30% of your training. That's higher than Kipchoge's numbers; but that's okay, given your lower total overall running load. The key point to remember is that we must have the discipline to keep that level there, without allowing too many of our easy runs to nudge up into zone 2.

The moral of the story is a cliché, but it's true: 'Train to race – don't race in training.' So hold back when you can, in order to go faster when you want to.

Professor Ross Tucker is one of the world's leading sports scientists, and the co-host of *The Real Science of Sport Podcast*. Follow him on @scienceofsport

LET'S GET FRUITY!

Nutrient-packed, hydrating and purpose-built for hot days – these fruit salads really deliver

Sweet caprese

The base:
3 tsp sugar
+ **1 tsp** thyme
+ **¼ tsp** pepper

The add-ins:
300g peaches
+ **150g** cherries, halved + **200g** cherry tomatoes, halved

The kicker:
200g mini mozzarella
+ **handful** of rocket + **50g** prosciutto, torn + **1 tbsp** balsamic vinegar

These aren't your average too sweet, looks-like-there-was-a-sale-on-honeydew kind of fruit salads. These ones are *better*, loaded with complex flavours that aren't just sugar. And let's not sell the nutrition short. The fact that they cover the colour spectrum signals their wide variety of disease-fighting antioxidants. Each recipe produces multiple servings – ideal for your pre-run snack, lunchtime side dish or evening dessert.

Muscle a muddle
A little sugar helps concentrate fresh fruit's flavour and improve its texture by creating a dressing of sorts. Using a rubber spatula or cocktail muddler, firmly mash all of the 'base' ingredients in a large bowl for about 30 secs. Easy.

Marinate
Chop your 'add-ins', mix them in and toss everything together and (if you have time) let it rest at room temperature, stirring every now and then until it gets all juicy, about 15 to 30 mins. Top with the 'kicker'. Each salad serves 4.

WORDS: MATTHEW KADEY. PHOTOGRAPHY: DANIELLE DALY. FOOD STYLING: SIMON ANDREWS

Mango-nana-berry

The base: **4 tsp** sugar + **2 tsp** lime zest + **2 tbsp** chopped basil

The add-ins: **250g** mango + **400g** strawberries + **3** large bananas

The kicker: **300g** black rice + **50g** roasted cashews + **2 tbsp** lime juice

Ginger plum

The base: **4 tsp** sugar + **1 tbsp** grated ginger

The add-ins: **225g** dark grapes + **250g** blueberries + **150g** plums

The kicker: **50g** almonds, sliced + **2 tbsp** lemon juice

Cucumber melon mint

The base: **3 tsp** sugar + **2 tsp** orange zest + **2 tbsp** chopped mint

The add-ins: **500g** watermelon + **450g** oranges + **200g** cucumber

The kicker: **75g** feta, crumbled + **3 tbsp** pistachios + **1 tsp** za'atar + **2 tbsp** lemon juice

Tropical vanilla

The base: **4 tsp** sugar + **2 tsp** grapefruit zest + **handful** of chopped Thai basil

The add-ins: **450g** dragon fruit + **150g** star fruit + **330g** mango

The kicker: **50g** unsalted peanuts + **1 tsp** vanilla extract

Pineapple coconut

The base: **4 tsp** sugar + **2 tsp** lime zest + **⅛ tsp** cayenne pepper

The add-ins: **400g** pineapple + **400g** papaya + **150g** avocado

The kicker: **25g** coconut chips + **2 tbsp** lime juice

Apple blackberry pie

The base: **3 tsp** sugar + **½ tsp** cinnamon + **½ tsp** ginger powder

The add-ins: **250g** apples + **280g** blackberries

The kicker: **100g** granola + **50g** walnuts, chopped + **2 tbsp** maple syrup + Greek yoghurt to serve

Mojito

The base: **4 tsp** sugar + **2 tsp** lime zest + **2 tbsp** chopped mint

The add-ins: **300g** cantaloupe melon + **300g** honeydew melon

The kicker: **2 tbsp** white rum + **2 tbsp** lime juice + **2 tbsp** pumpkin seeds

Raspberry velvet

The base: **4 tsp** sugar + **2 tsp** lemon zest

The add-ins: **180g** raspberries + **360g** apricots + **3** large bananas

The kicker: **60g** dark chocolate, chopped + **40g** hazelnuts, halved

Green supreme

The base: **4 tsp** sugar + **1 tbsp** grated ginger

The add-ins: **360g** kiwi + **300g** green grapes + **120g** granny smith apples

The kicker: **60g** baby spinach + **40g** pistachios

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FOOD TO GO

EXPERT NUTRITION ADVICE
TO FUEL YOUR RUNNING

BY RENEE McGREGOR

Fuel economy

Some ideas on cost-effective nutrition options for energy and recovery

Sports nutrition has evolved over the past decade, with products available for all palates and aspects of training. But while there's ample choice, the cost can sometimes be hard to swallow. With many of us feeling the pinch these days, are there ways we can fuel our training appropriately but save the pennies?

Points to remember

Before embarking on DIY options, it's important to remember that our body's preferred currency for energy is glucose, and studies recommend 30g to 60g of carbohydrate per hour during endurance runs up to three hours, and 60g to 90g of carbohydrate per hour for longer runs. It's also worth bearing in mind that we can only absorb about 60g of glucose and 30g of fructose an hour, although there are studies emerging that suggest we can train our gut to absorb higher quantities.

Simple swaps

The average energy gel contains around 20g to 30g of carbs, depending on the brand. The equivalent would be:

1/ A medium banana – not the easiest to transport but useful for training
2/ 5 to 6 regular jelly babies
3/ 2 x 16g packets of Haribo Starmix
4/ 2 small boxes of raisins
5/ 4 pitted dates

However, before you become overzealous with the dried fruit, do remember that overconsuming fructose can contribute to higher rates of gastrointestinal distress, especially during runs.

When it comes to sports drinks such as Lucozade and Gatorade, these provide 30g of carbohydrate per 500ml and around 25mmol of sodium. A simple alternative is to dilute 300ml of orange juice with 300ml of water and add ¼ tsp of salt, which gives you exactly the same.

Recovery stakes

Turning our attention to recovery, the obvious choice is milk or a variety of flavoured milk. In fact, most of the recovery drink options on the market are based on milk and its nutritional profile, as it provides the exact mix of protein, carbohydrate, electrolytes and hydration needed for optimal recovery. However, it's important to remember that some plant-based milk alternatives are not quite as nutrient-dense as the dairy kind, so those who are plant-based may have to be more mindful. For example, having a carton of chocolate soya milk alongside a banana will ensure that any discrepancies in nutrition are met.

Make your own

For those who feel they want to go one step further, there's also the option to create your own pre-run and recovery fuel. Good options for pre-fuel include flapjacks, banana bread or a fruit juice-based smoothie. As we've already discussed, milk and flavoured milk are convenient and nutritious recovery options, but you could also make your own recovery smoothies. Try blending frozen fruit, milk, Greek-style yoghurt and a squeeze of honey for a quick and easy recipe.

For colder days, try a recovery hot chocolate – use milk fortified with skimmed-milk powder to enhance the protein content.

Store cupboard heroes

When you're being careful with money, it might feel like you have to compromise on nutrition. However, in reality, there are a number of common staples that not only deliver on nutrient value, but are also budget-friendly. Here are my top three.

1/ **Frozen fruit and vegetables:** these actually often have higher vitamin and mineral content than fresh varieties, as they're picked and frozen immediately to preserve their nutritional profile.
2/ **Tinned fish:** especially the oily variety, such as sardines, salmon and pilchards, which are packed full of calcium, vitamin D, omega-3 fatty acids and protein.
3/ **Tinned pulses:** these are incredibly versatile and provide plenty of soluble fibre, B vitamins and iron.

Renee McGregor is a leading sports dietitian with over 20 years' experience. reneemcgregor.com

PHOTOGRAPHY: STUDIO 33; GETTY IMAGES

CENTRE STAGE
A pre-run core workout can offer enormous benefits

CORE PRINCIPLES

Training your midsection can improve all areas of your running game, says Amanda Brooks

RUNNERS SPEND A LOT OF TIME SEARCHING for the perfect training plan that combines easy runs, speed workouts and rest days to keep building their fitness. Most plans will also include a day or two listed as cross-training, which many use as an opportunity for additional cardio.

But if we dedicated that time to strength training, specifically our core, we'd reduce the chance of injury, increase our speed and run more efficiently. In the past decade as a running coach, I've helped runners through hip pain, runner's knee, lower back pain and IT band syndrome, which nearly every physiotherapist I consult with has correlated with a weak core.

This doesn't just mean a weak six-pack (also known as the rectus abdominis). Your core actually encompasses the trunk of your body, which comprises 29 pairs of muscles including those that lie deeper in your centre, such as the transverse abdominis, internal obliques, pelvic floor and the muscles situated along the spine, like the erector spinae. Your glutes, hip flexors, lats and traps are all part of the core, too.

Anatomy aside, this is a reminder that our midsection requires more than a few crunches. A strong core also means that your glutes will be able to help keep your knees in proper alignment when you run, preventing knee and ankle pain, and that your back has the endurance to maintain good posture even as you fatigue on longer runs, so you can sustain pace and form. Not only that, it also allows your hips to remain level with each footfall, reducing force down the leg and therefore helping to decrease the risk of sustaining overuse injuries.

Going back to basic movement patterns, focusing on body weight only, is an outstanding way to build the mind-body connection and increase core strength. Body-weight exercises provide plenty of resistance to challenge key muscles – although I'm also a fan of adding resistance bands to increase intensity. Ideally, your training plan should include at least two strength sessions per week. But schedules are rarely ideal, so even 10 minutes of core work done consistently will have benefits.

Knowing my athletes are busy people, I created a daily 10-minute programme called the 30-Day Core Challenge. My goal is to provide runners with a specific set of moves so they're not overwhelmed by where to start and can simply dedicate time before every single run to work the abs, hips and glutes.

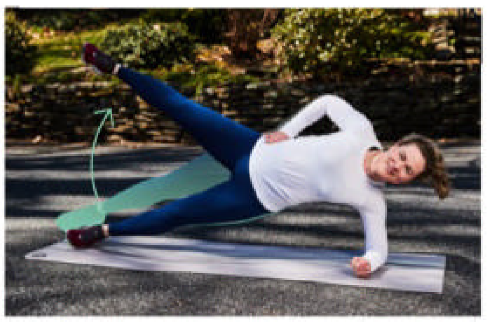
A STRONG CORE CAN REDUCE INJURY RISK

Adding moves to your existing warm-up has the effect of stimulating your muscles, so they'll work more efficiently throughout your run. This also means you're less likely to skip doing the core work when your to-do list is already overloaded.

When first adding core workouts to your schedule, you might find you struggle to hold a plank for 30 seconds or complete 10 reps of a movement. That's normal and simply a reminder to stay consistent. Focus on mastering the basic movements and you'll build more power than if you progress without making the connection between the exercise and the muscles you should feel firing in that move.

After just a couple of weeks of core workouts, most runners notice increased stability in their stride and less deterioration of their running form as they fatigue. And those changes will make it easier to stay as committed to your core as you are to your daily runs.

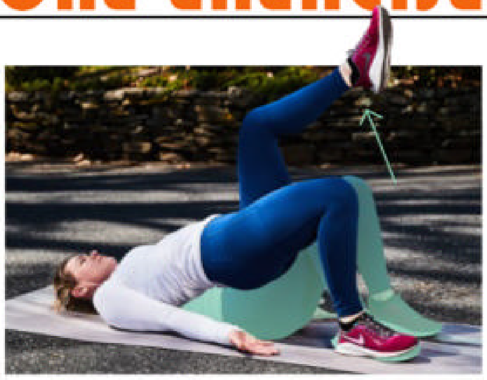
NEXT-LEVEL CORE EXERCISES TO MASTER



● Side plank leg raise

Holding a side plank for 30 seconds is a good start, but adding additional movement increases your core stability and muscle engagement.

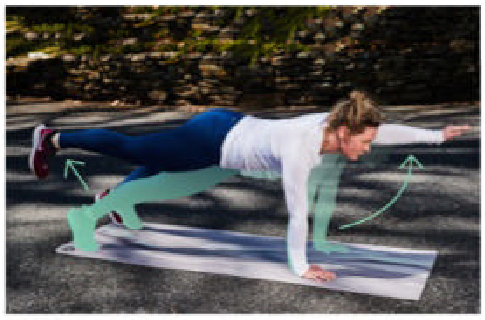
Muscles targeted Transverse abdominis, obliques, gluteus medius and other hip abductors.
How Place your left forearm on the ground perpendicular to your body, with your legs extended in a straight line. Press your forearm and bottom foot into the ground, and raise your hips so your body forms a straight line. With your obliques and glutes engaged and your hips high, raise your right leg a few inches or more (to maintain core engagement), then lower. Repeat the leg raise 5 to 10 times, then switch sides and repeat.



● Hip bridge march

To progress beyond raising up into a simple hip bridge, add in a march to fire up the glutes prior to a run.

Muscles targeted Gluteus maximus, rectus abdominis, lower back and hamstrings.
How Lie on your back with your feet flat on the floor and knees bent. Place your arms by your sides with your fingertips reaching towards your heels. Pressing into your heels, raise your hips towards the ceiling to create a straight line from your neck to your knees. Once you feel stable, raise your left foot (to maintain core engagement) off the ground, put it back down, then raise your right foot, and put it back down. Keep your hips from rocking. Repeat 10 times per side.



● Alternating arm and leg plank

A standard plank engages your core, but if you've nailed that, you'll benefit more from finding stability on the go. Dynamic plank movements will engage more muscles and assist your run.

Muscles targeted Transverse abdominis, obliques, glutes, lower back, quads and shoulders.
How Put your hands on the ground in line with your shoulders, extend your legs back, and place your feet shoulder-width apart. Focus on engaging your entire trunk from your abs to your glutes. Raise your right arm and left leg, hold for a breath and return to plank position. Your body should stay in a straight line. Repeat on the other side, raising your left arm and right leg. Aim for 10 reps per side.

PHOTOGRAPHY: TREVOR RAAB

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RUNNER'S WORLD
2023
EXPERT
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Lend us your ears

From power tunes to podcasts, the right aural accompaniment can enhance your running experience. Use our expert-tested pick of the best earphones for runners to hit the right note

RUNNER'S WORLD
2023
BEST IN TEST

Sennheiser Sport True Wireless

£119.99, sennheiser-hearing.com

BATTERY LIFE: Nine hours (buds), 27 hours (with case)

WATERPROOF: IP54 for dust, splash and sweat resistance

Sennheiser's sports-specific pedigree really shows here. Three different sizes of ear adapters and four different sizes of ear fins combine to provide you with a uniquely customisable fit, which our testers found stayed firmly in place. The 'adaptable acoustic' tech means you can opt to have the ear adapters open, to stay aware of your surroundings but minimise body noise, such as your breathing and footfall, or closed, to block outside noise and immerse yourself in your chosen soundtrack. Testers were also impressed with the sound quality, which they felt punched way above the price tag.

Apple AirPods Pro (2nd Generation)

£249, apple.com

BATTERY LIFE: Six hours (buds), 30 hours (with case)

WATERPROOF: IPX4 withstands splashes and heavy downpours

Thanks to an upgraded H2 chip and amplifier, these buds have a noticeably deeper bass and clearer sound. The transparency mode has greatly improved and there's less crackle when wind passes over the microphones. Not only do they feel lightweight and comfortable, but the fit is reassuringly secure, with our tester suffering no fall-out over a variety of terrain and paces. Perhaps the biggest reason to love these buds is that AirPods finally have on-ear volume control and wireless charging.

Samsung Galaxy Buds2 Pro

£219, samsung.com

BATTERY LIFE: Eight hours (buds), 18 hours (with case)

WATERPROOF: IPX7 means they can be submerged to a depth of one metre for up to 30 minutes

Easy to lodge into the ears, these were very secure and comfortable on the run. Sound quality scored highly, with one audiophile praising the 'smooth, rich sound'. Testers were very impressed with the battery life, which can be extended via the charging case, the noise cancellation and the voice detection, which lowers the volume when you're talking. Samsung users can enjoy some extras, such as 24-bit audio and 360-degree head tracking. ▶

RUNNER'S WORLD 2023
HIGHLY COMMENDED

Bang & Olufsen Beoplay EX

£349, bang-olufsen.com

BATTERY LIFE: Eight hours (buds), 28 hours (with case)

WATERPROOF: IP57, dust-resistant and waterproof up to one metre

They're obviously quite an investment, but if you're happy to splash out for quality, these certainly deliver. The sound is standout superb, adjustable to suit your personal preferences via the B&O smartphone app and equipped with both noise-cancelling and transparency modes to block out or let in external sounds. You can tailor the fit via four sizes of silicone ear tips, although our tester used the 'comply' memory foam earbud tips for an even more secure ear-lock. The on-bud controls are simple and responsive to use when running, with no stopping to faff with volume or track selection. The case is also small and light enough to carry for extra juice on all-day outings.

Jabra Elite 7 Active

£169.99, jabra.co.uk

BATTERY LIFE: Eight hours (buds), 30 hours (with case)

WATERPROOF: IP57 dust, sweat and waterproof durability up to temporary immersion

When you pop these buds into your ears, your session gets dialled up with a crisp sound that brings backing instruments to life. This device has six microphones that are great for phone calls, while also powering the noise-cancellation and transparency features. On top of the solid sound quality, what makes these ideal for runners is what Jabra calls 'ShakeGrip' – a sticky silicone that keeps the buds locked in your ear canal – no matter how sweaty you get – without the need for hooks or wings.

Haylou PurFree BC01 Bone Conduction

£110, haylou.info

BATTERY LIFE: Eight hours

WATERPROOF: IP67, fully protected from dust and water submersion up to one metre deep

A great option for runners who like to be audio-aware of their surroundings, or even wish to combine tunes and chat on group runs. Testers rated the quick-charge feature, lightweight design and secure fit, saying that the buds didn't budge when they ramped up the pace. The wrap-around band didn't feel too tight and the control buttons were very responsive on the move. As with all bone-conducting earphones, the audio quality isn't out of this world and there's a hefty amount of sound leakage, too, but you may feel it's a worthy compromise for your safety.

WORDS: JEFF DENGATE; PRIYANKAA JOSHI; JOE MACKIE. MAIN IMAGE COURTESY OF: JABRA

H2O TRI Pro Multi-Sport Headphones

£126, h2Oaudio.com

BATTERY LIFE: Five hours

WATERPROOF: IPX8, resistant for prolonged water submersion

Does your training schedule also involve lengths in a pool? The H2O headphones use bone conduction, as Shokz does. But, because bluetooth doesn't pass easily through water, this set has built-in memory to store music. When you're running, you can switch the set to bluetooth mode and stream music from your phone like any other pair. Our tester appreciated the good sound quality, though noted that if you turn the volume up too high, the bass will actually vibrate the pads on your face. The wrap-around band can feel a little bulky, but if you want swim-friendly sounds, these are a great option.

Shokz OpenRun Pro Mini

£159.95, sportsshoes.com

BATTERY LIFE: Eight hours

WATERPROOF: IP55 rating weathers dust and moisture

For road runners who aren't comfortable jamming an earbud in as cars whizz past, you might enjoy the bone-conduction technology that transfers sound through your cheekbones, leaving your ears open to the sounds around you. The compromise for safety is fidelity – you won't mistake these for a decent pair of in-ear buds – but the music is clear enough, even on loud streets. Podcasts can get overpowered in cities, but work fine on quieter outings. The OpenRun Pro comes in two sizes and the Mini has a shorter band that wraps around your head and bounces less.

JLab Epic Air Sport ANC

£99.99, uk.jlab.com

BATTERY LIFE: 15 hours (buds), 55 hours (with case)

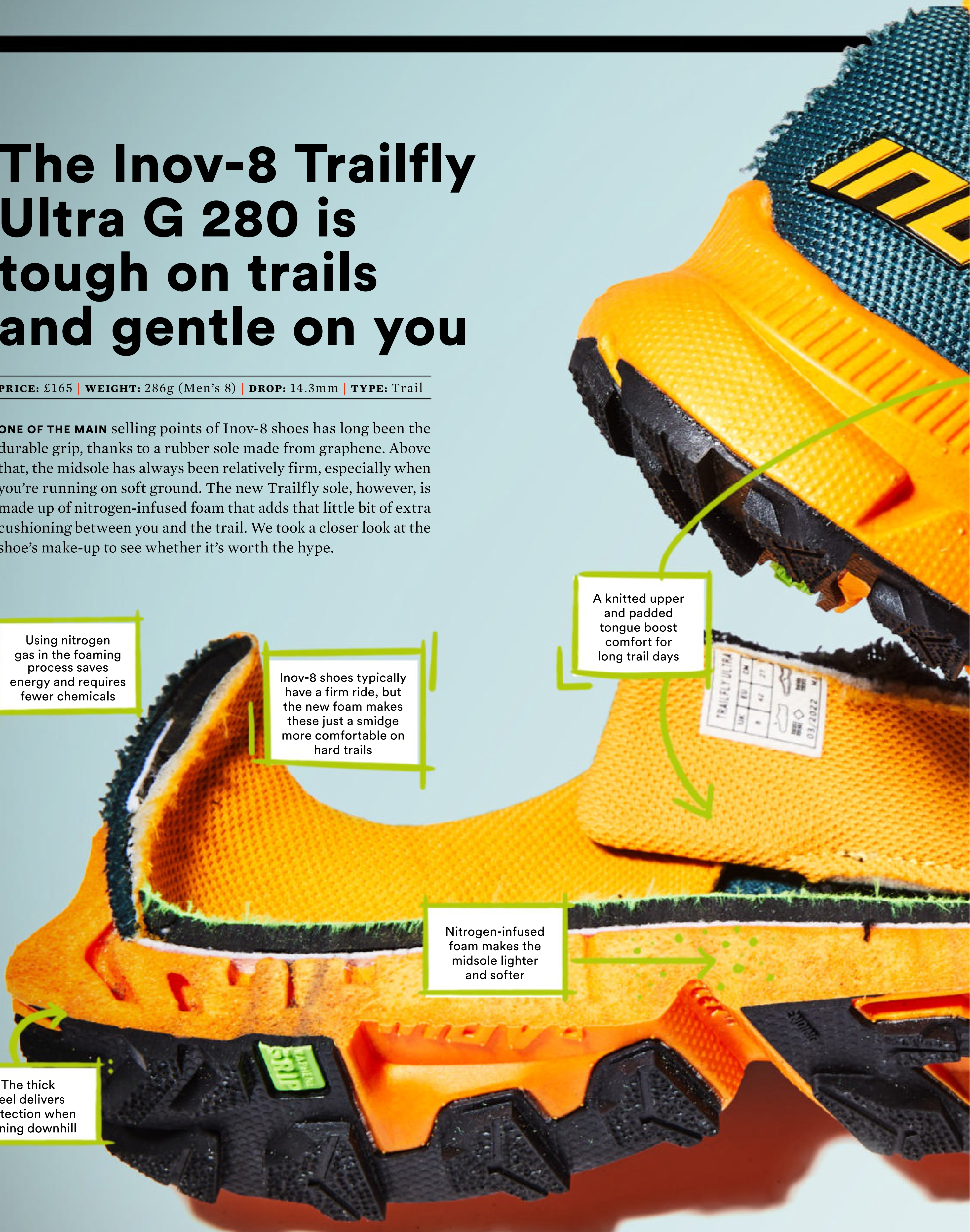
WATERPROOF: IP66 water resistance against powerful jets

Six differently sized tips, plus ergonomic over-the-ear hooks, deliver a super-secure fit. Noise-cancelling mode blocks external sounds well, while 'be aware' mode lets more surrounding sounds in. Testers found the touch controls to be fumble-free and intuitive, but battery life is the standout feature – you can get a whopping 55 hours. The payback is the case – it's rather bulky, but given the mammoth battery life, you shouldn't need to bring it along anyway. Don't expect sound quality to be the best, but it's a cheaper alternative.

The Inov-8 Trailfly Ultra G 280 is tough on trails and gentle on you

PRICE: £165 | **WEIGHT:** 286g (Men's 8) | **DROP:** 14.3mm | **TYPE:** Trail

ONE OF THE MAIN selling points of Inov-8 shoes has long been the durable grip, thanks to a rubber sole made from graphene. Above that, the midsole has always been relatively firm, especially when you're running on soft ground. The new Trailfly sole, however, is made up of nitrogen-infused foam that adds that little bit of extra cushioning between you and the trail. We took a closer look at the shoe's make-up to see whether it's worth the hype.



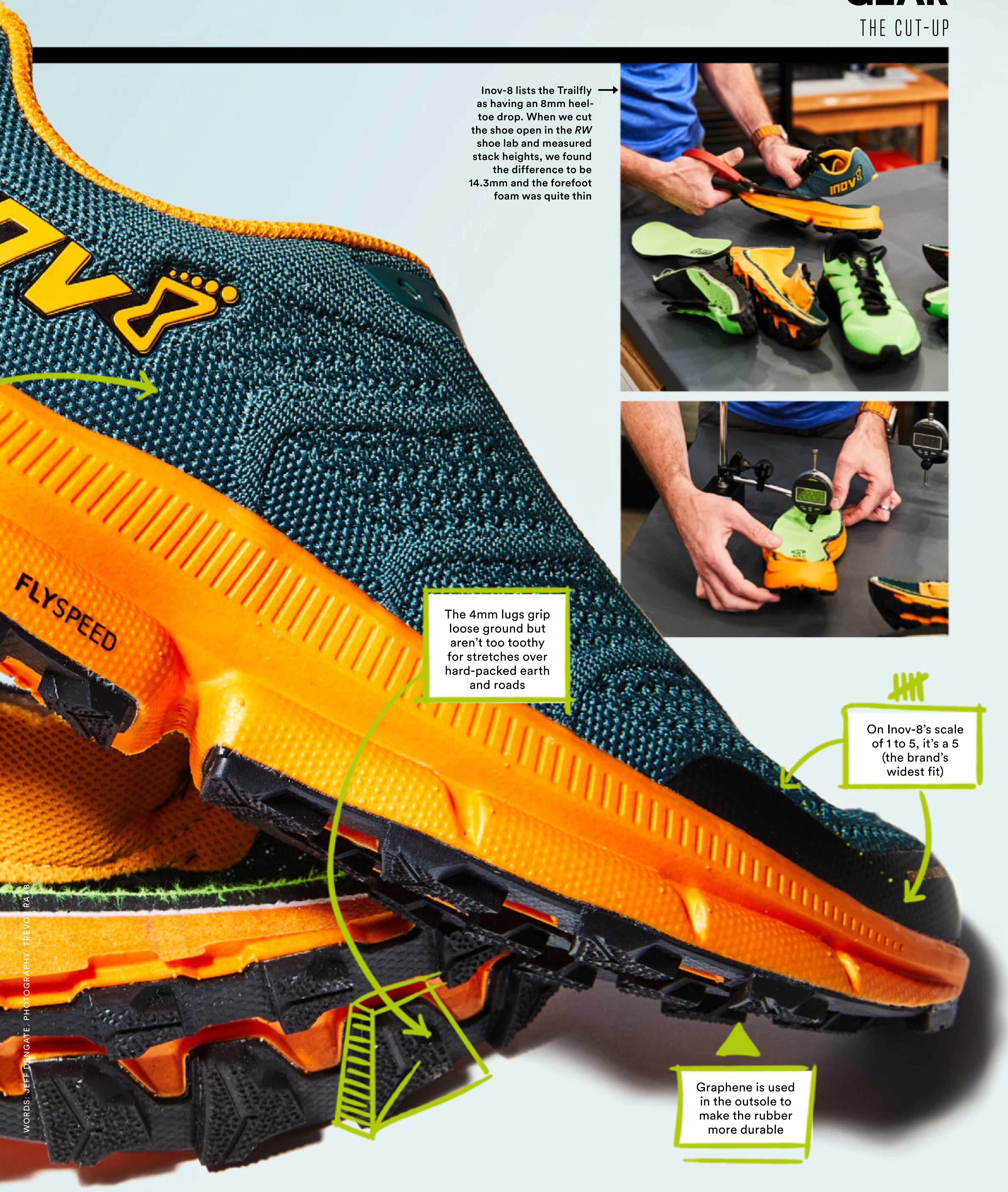
A knitted upper and padded tongue boost comfort for long trail days

Using nitrogen gas in the foaming process saves energy and requires fewer chemicals

Inov-8 shoes typically have a firm ride, but the new foam makes these just a smidge more comfortable on hard trails

Nitrogen-infused foam makes the midsole lighter and softer

The thick heel delivers protection when running downhill



Inov-8 lists the Trailfly as having an 8mm heel-toe drop. When we cut the shoe open in the *RW* shoe lab and measured stack heights, we found the difference to be 14.3mm and the forefoot foam was quite thin

The 4mm lugs grip loose ground but aren't too toothy for stretches over hard-packed earth and roads

On Inov-8's scale of 1 to 5, it's a 5 (the brand's widest fit)

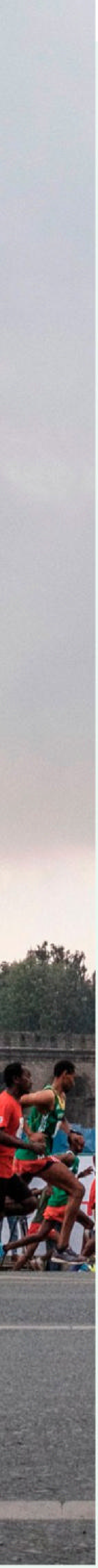
Graphene is used in the outsole to make the rubber more durable

WORDS: JEFF DENGATE. PHOTOGRAPHY: TREVOR RAAB

RACE

LET YOUR RUNNING LOOSE

BEST OF THE BEST
Many of the greats have run the Great Ethiopian Run. Elite runners have an earlier start time than the masses



ADDIS ABABA

THIS RACE COMES HAILE RECOMMENDED

David Smyth heads to Addis Ababa for the Great Ethiopian Run, an ebullient 10K co-founded by Ethiopian distance great Haile Gebrselassie

---

I'M A BIT WORRIED I won't be able to run after all this dancing. The start line of the Great Ethiopian Run, a 10K road race for around 40,000 people in the centre of Addis Ababa, is the opposite of tense. The crowd around me seem perfectly happy to stay in this spot all day, moving and shouting in unison to booming African pop music as the 8am sun beats down.

Ethiopia is a long way to come to run a 10K, but this is a special one, the largest road race on the continent. If it seems a bit thin on the spectator front, that's because everyone in the city appears to be taking part. A couple of drones zip past above, the only way to take in the scale of the thing. Three different start zones along broad Ras Mekonnen Avenue have been allocated green, yellow and red T-shirts, like an attempt to make the Ethiopian flag visible from space.

The people are big football fans, but running is really the national sport – thanks to a long history of distance running feats that stretches back to Abebe Bikila winning Africa's first ever Olympic gold medal at the Rome marathon in 1960. Today, Selemon Barega is the current men's 10,000m Olympic champion, while Letesenbet Gidey holds the women's world records for 5000m, 10,000m and half marathon. And you can't forget Haile Gebrselassie, double

CANAL+
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SOAK UP THE CARNIVAL VIBES
The start line feels like a party – it's not a race about going fast, it's about taking in the atmosphere

Olympic and four-time World Championship gold medallist at 10,000m – not least because the 50-year-old co-founded this race in 2001 and pops up absolutely everywhere this weekend.

As he takes to the start-line stage – alongside Ethiopia's first female President, Sahle-Work Zewde, and pop star Hamelmal Abate, who sings the national anthem – I can't say that those around me look like serious runners despite their proud lineage. Some people are in cut-off jean shorts. Plenty of women have sliced up the lower part of their race T-shirt to create tassels. Enterprising street hawkers have painted numerous smiling faces in the colours of the flag. It's a carnival itching to march.

On the other hand, looking across to the wide half-ellipse of grand Meskel Square, lines of lean men and women are striding up and down in formation warm-ups, their synchronisation demonstrating that they've done this many times. A separate elite start for around 300 runners is highly competitive, with entrants travelling from Kenya and Uganda to have a go. Ethiopian Abe Gashaw becomes the first man to win the race three times, whizzing home in his super shoes in 28:32, and Tigist Ketema takes the women's prize in 32:54. Both receive cheques for 150,000 birr (£2,300). Many of the greats have toed this line in the past, including inaugural victor Haile Gebrselassie and, 17 years ago, a young Kenyan called Eliud Kipchoge.

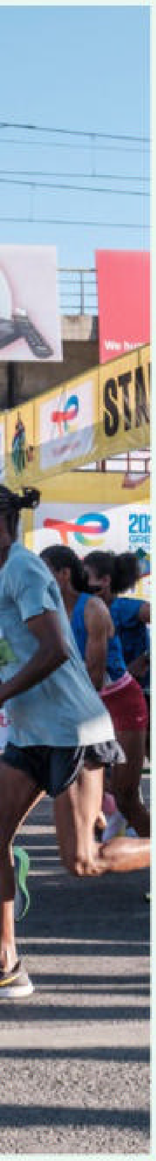
The main race is more freeform. The elite runners have chip timers on their shoes but the masses don't. The moment the national anthem finishes, the MC shouts, 'Stay where you are!' but we're off regardless. Even though I'm in the green zone, within minutes we're weaving around slowly moving red and yellow T-shirts who appear to have started their race wherever they please. One competitor cruises past on Rollerblades. If there's a rule book, no one's read it.

The first couple of kilometres descend a wide boulevard with a railway bridge above, all the concrete echoing the shouts of excited runners. The weather is sunny and warm but not too hot to run. A man who sticks with me most of the way has a long-sleeved shirt under his race T-shirt and tracksuit bottoms beneath his shorts. The most noticeable thing for a visitor is the air here at 2,355m above sea level. On a couple of mild inclines, I'm amazed at how shallow and rapid my breathing becomes.

With race adrenaline pumping faster than usual, I can't help but try to run quickly, realising as the crowd thins around me that I'm missing a lot of the fun. Along Yohanis Street, past the green surroundings of the government's Eyubelyu Palace, we meet more packs of strolling yellow and red T-shirts who've come from a different road. 'Ferenj!' they shout, meaning 'foreigner'. 'Run, John! Run, John!' Apparently, as a white face, I must be called John. They're simply enjoying their morning.

For most people, it feels less like a competition and more like one of

PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES; ASHENAFI GUDETA



Some runners come to race, but the majority of people at the Great Ethiopian Run are here for a morning of slower-paced celebration.

those days when they temporarily pedestrianise your high street for Christmas shopping. A day earlier, these roads had been stuffed with honking traffic, a casual Ethiopian approach to road regulations meaning that if the street is painted in three lanes, four or five will be darting daringly across each other. There's a joyfulness about the cars being gone for a few hours, the city on the move in a different, better way. Five right turns later, the golden arch of the 23-storey Wegagen Bank headquarters comes back into view and it's all over.

The aftermath includes a blingy gold medal, a bottle of the sponsor's tangy malt drink and lots of selfies with people excited to spy a rare ferenj. I've had a ball and sit for ages watching the remaining finishers. Note to self: must go slower next time.

The 2023 Sofi Malt Great Ethiopian Run International 10km takes place on 19 November 2023, ethiopianrun.org

THE LOWDOWN

GET THERE Ethiopian Airlines flies direct from Heathrow to Addis Ababa once a day (ethiopianairlines.com).

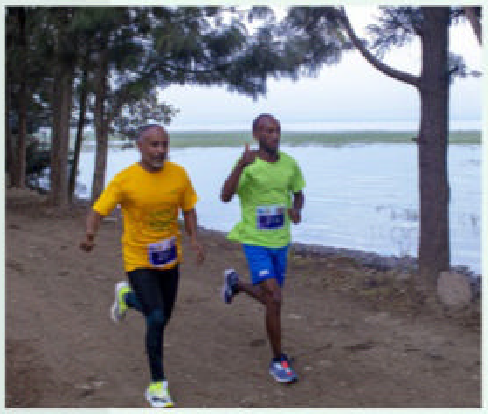
STAY Quality hotels in the city include the Hyatt Regency around the corner from the 10K start line (hyatt.com), the architecturally impressive Skylight Hotel (ethiopianskylighthotel.com) and the Radisson Blu (radissonhotels.com).

RACE ENTRY There's a package for international entrants that includes a pre-race pasta party at the official race hotel, the Hyatt Regency, where Haile Gebrselassie will mingle. Visitors can also experience a jog in the Entoto forest at 3,000m above sea level, where the giants of Ethiopian running have trained.

Like this? Try… three other African races

1. INTERNATIONAL MARATHON DE MARRAKECH

In mild January weather, around 11,500 runners will journey a loop around this stunning Moroccan city. A flat, fast course passes endless palm and olive trees, and the ramparts of the ancient city. **January 2024, marrakechmarathon.com**



2. HAWASSA HALF MARATHON

This is the longer sister race to the 10K in Addis Ababa, and the Ethiopian town of Hawassa is a mere 1,700m above sea level. Participants run along the shore of the town's large lake. There's also a mass 8km race that starts a bit later. **February 2024, ethiopianrun.org/hawassa-half-marathon**

3. COMRADES MARATHON

The world's oldest, most popular ultramarathon covers 55 miles between Durban and Pietermaritzburg in South Africa. Do it 10 times and you get a green race number that's yours for life. **11 June 2023, comrades.com**

MALNUTRITION APPEAL

MEDECINS SANS FRONTIERES
DOCTORS WITHOUT BORDERS

TREATING MALNUTRITION IS ABOUT MORE THAN FOOD. IT'S ABOUT MEDICAL CARE.

An MSF nurse helps a mother feed her four-month-old malnourished child in Madarounfa clinic, Niger. Photograph © Oliver Barth/MSF

DR JENNA BROOME IS A DOCTOR RECENTLY RETURNED FROM ETHIOPIA

"The malnutrition crisis in Ethiopia is the worst I've ever seen. You walk into our feeding centres and there are malnourished children everywhere. All our beds are full, family members are sleeping on the floors, mattresses line the corridors and, every day, more desperately ill people arrive. We just can't turn anybody away.

People walk for miles to get to us, carrying their children. We see kids brought in who are really sick, almost at the point where they won't survive. But with just a little bit of care and some focused treatment, we see them turn around. We give them antibiotics, oxygen and blood transfusions and, once they are stabilised, start them on therapeutic food and they begin to get better. You see their personalities come back, they start to smile, they come alive again.

It's the best feeling in the world witnessing something like that, watching kids who could barely lift their heads a few weeks earlier running and playing. It's so moving to see parents having their little ones restored to them.

Malnutrition isn't just hunger. These children have an inability to fight off infectious disease because their immune systems have been so compromised that they need a whole range of medical care.

But one thing I've learned working for MSF is that it doesn't take that much to combat malnutrition. With the right treatment and care, kids can really bounce back. You don't need a lot of fancy kit. You need antibiotics, vaccinations, basic medical equipment, therapeutic food, and doctors and nurses who can do the work. You can do an awful lot with very little.

It's completely unacceptable that children are still dying of starvation in 2023 when it's so treatable and preventable. And it's not just in Ethiopia. In Nigeria, in South Sudan, in Somalia, MSF teams are treating men, women and children caught up in this ongoing malnutrition crisis.

If MSF wasn't there, many of these children would die. We need your support to keep reaching and treating people affected by this malnutrition crisis. We can't do it without you."

MALNUTRITION EMERGENCY

Conflict, poor weather conditions and price rises are driving a deadly spike in malnutrition in many parts of the world. Children under five are most at risk. In Niger, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia and South Sudan, MSF is operating specialised inpatient feeding centres and is providing critical care to paediatric patients with severe medical complications. Treating malnutrition with food is not enough. Young children with severe malnutrition can become extremely vulnerable to conditions they'd otherwise recover from. We need your support to provide the lifesaving medical care these children desperately need.

£19	can provide a month of lifesaving therapeutic food to treat a severely malnourished child
£194	could pay for a sustenance kit to help mothers provide babies with essential nutrition
£82	could pay for two blood pressure monitors to help detect underlying health issues

THANK YOU

100% of funding for our work comes from private donors. it's your support that enables us to provide emergency medical care.

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TREATING MALNUTRITION IS ABOUT MORE THAN FOOD. IT'S ABOUT MEDICAL CARE.

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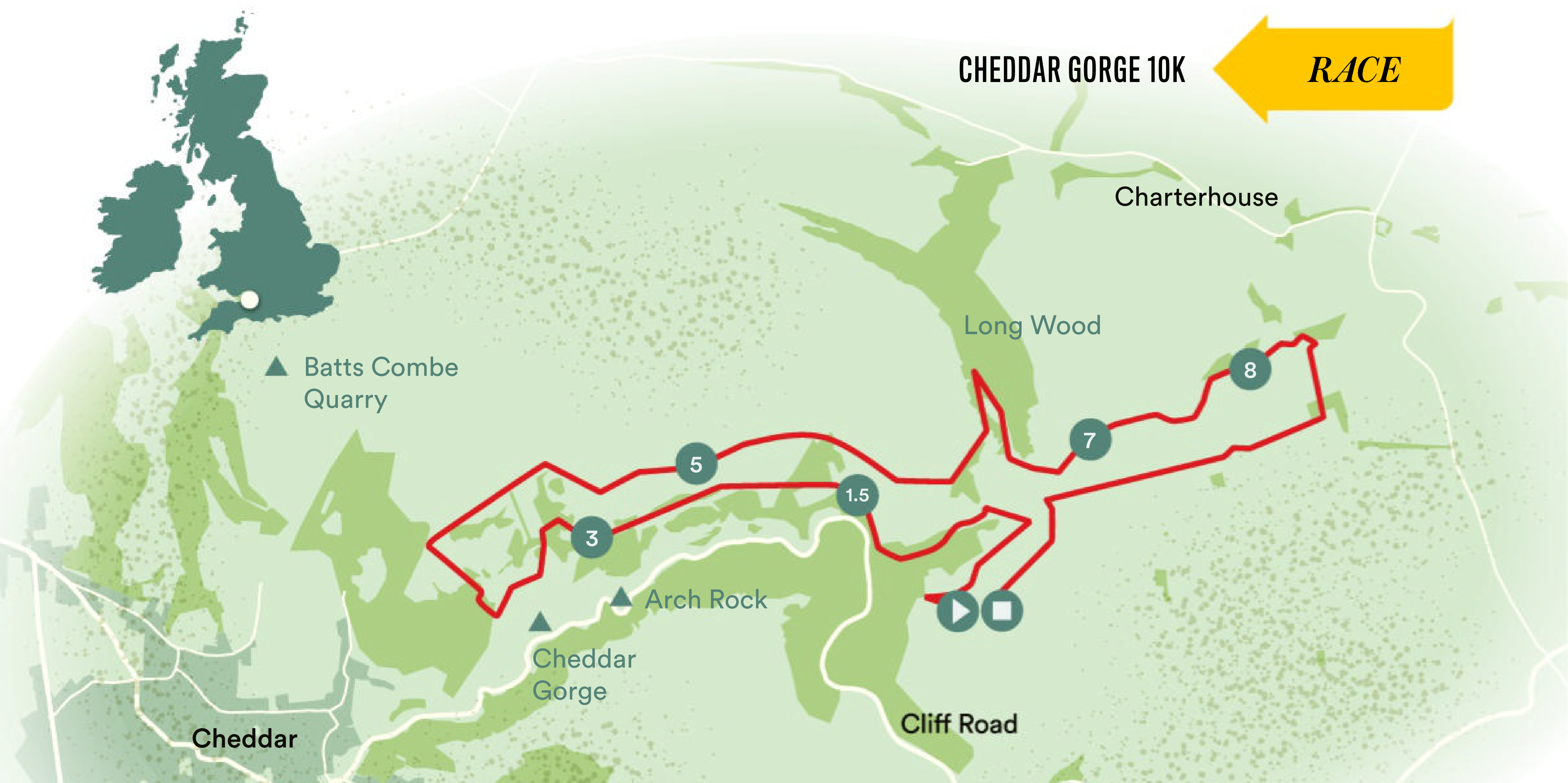
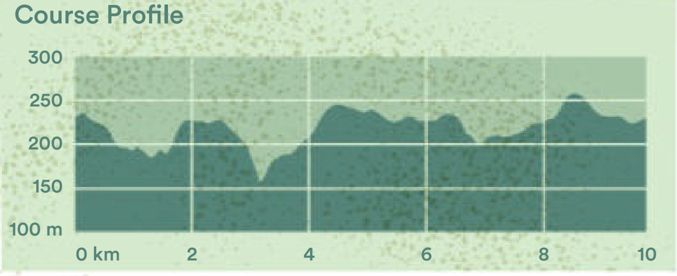




ROUTE RECCE

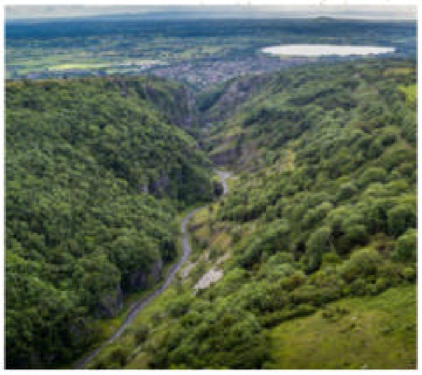
CHEDDAR GORGE 10K

Race director Tom Room guides you on a trail race around one of the West Country's best-known landmarks

WORDS: ADRIAN MONTI. ILLUSTRATION: HARVEY SYMONS. PHOTOGRAPHY: GETTY IMAGES

'IT WILL BE THE 10TH RUNNING of this event, which now includes a marathon, half marathon, 10K, 6K and 1K races,' says Room, 'We've also started our own omnium, which is a fun event where entrants do a hill climb, 100m sprint and 1K run in addition to one of the longer runs; your combined score from the four events determines your overall placing. The 10K is a very scenic trail run, and as it's not super tough, has a wide appeal. Our races are part of the Top of the Gorge Adventure Weekend, a mini festival organised by the National Trust. Families can camp on the site, enjoy food, a bar and listen to fireside talks between races over the weekend.'

The 2023 race is on Sunday 11 June. Visit relishrunningraces.com



START

Runners gather near the event HQ's campsite with the hamlet of Charterhouse in the backdrop. Along a rocky path cutting across open fields, you're slowly eased in with a gentle descent.

1.5KM

The first of the route's three climbs begins here as you head up the valley via Hell Steps, a steep flight of wood-buttressed stairs dug into the hillside. But don't be fooled by the false summit after your first flight, there's a second lung-busting set just ahead. After the climb, your hard work will be rewarded with a panoramic view of the Somerset Levels, Mendip Hills and Glastonbury Tor.

3KM

You're now on an elevated path above the gorge, but safely away from the edge so it won't feel perilous. Take a second to soak up the view of the towering limestone gorge and twisting road below.

5KM

Here's where you pick up your pace on a relatively flat section through fields before reaching a woodland stretch that will offer you some shade on a hot day.

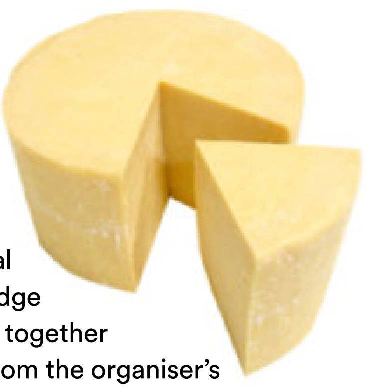
7KM

Runners pass through Velvet Bottom, a nature reserve that was mined extensively for lead as far back as the Romans and up until the Victorian era. There are still signs of this activity visible on the valley floor today.

8KM

It's worth keeping your energy back for this final short but sharp climb that takes you out of the valley. This ascent features in the event's omnium hill climb challenge, so you may become very familiar with it.

FINISH



Enjoy a flat final stretch to the finish line. Your own bespoke medal has a jigsaw edge that will piece together with medals from the organiser's other events. Relax and enjoy a variety of free snacks including fruit, chocolate bars and, of course, Mini Cheddars.

THE START LIST

Our selection of the best, fastest, toughest, quirkiest and most enjoyable UK races this month

Key

- Road
- Trail
- Urban
- Rural
- Flat
- Hilly
- Eco-friendly

Freckleton Half Marathon

Freckleton, Lancashire, 18 June

Take part in running history with this outstanding event, located in between Preston and Blackpool. It's the oldest half marathon in the country and began back in 1965, inspired by Ron Hill's participation in the 1964 Olympics. Hill took part in the inaugural event and won it in a zippy 65:44. You'll have every chance of recording a decent time yourself on this mostly flat road race, which starts at a public transport-friendly 2pm.

bookitzone.com

Giants Head Marathon

Sydling St Nicholas, Dorset, 17 June

This is certainly one of the hardest marathons in the UK, and not just because of the 1,000m of elevation (all in the form of short, steep climbs with double-digit gradients, might we add). It also passes the quite remarkable Cerne Giant, an enormous chalk figure carved into a hillside near Cerne Abbas. Yes, before the giggles at the back get too loud, it's the one with the big… protuberance.

whitestarrunning.co.uk

Norn Iron Ultra 100

Ballintoy, Co. Antrim, 3-4 June

The Ulster Way stretches for some 1,024km in a circle around all six counties of Northern Ireland. This 100-miler covers a section of the Way from Ballintoy on the County Antrim coastline, heading west along the coast before veering south into the Sperrin Mountains. These boggy, rugged hills are achingly beautiful but also come with some achingly painful inclines.

werunwildni.com

Filey Lions 10K Beach Race

Filey, Yorkshire, 4 June

Is it just us, or does the *Jaws* theme music start playing in your head as soon as you hear the words 'beach' and 'race'? Those who race on sand truly are the bravest and most admirable among us and we salute you – because no matter how tightly packed that sand is, it's always going to drain your energy terrifyingly quickly. This race is a straightforward out-and-back. Shark attacks unlikely.

fileylionsclub.org

Chippenham Longest Day 10K

Chippenham, Wiltshire, 21 June

Daylight will last for a wonderful 16 hours, 37 minutes and 51 seconds in Chippenham this 21 June, the longest day of the year. It most likely won't take you that long to complete this 10K, which is just as well because you can only start at 7.30pm anyway. In fact, thanks to this quick road route with only a few hills, you may well do it a heck of a lot faster than you would expect.

dbmax.co.uk

Sharpness Canal Race

Sharpness, Gloucestershire, 10 June

The canal that runs between Sharpness and Gloucester opened in 1824 and was once the broadest and deepest canal in the world, helping enormous volumes of maritime traffic avoid an awkward bend in the River Severn. These days it's a bit quieter and, at 16 miles, is the perfect length for a scenic and traffic-free race.

eventswerun.co.uk

Jersey Half Marathon

St Brelade, Jersey, 11 June

Kudos to the organisers of this event for their efforts to make the race more sustainable – as an island event, they're more aware than most that short-haul flights have a disproportionately high carbon impact. They've done away with free race tees (you can choose to plant a tree instead) and their medal is made of recycled paper and contains wildflower seeds, so you can commemorate your race in a beautiful corner of your garden.

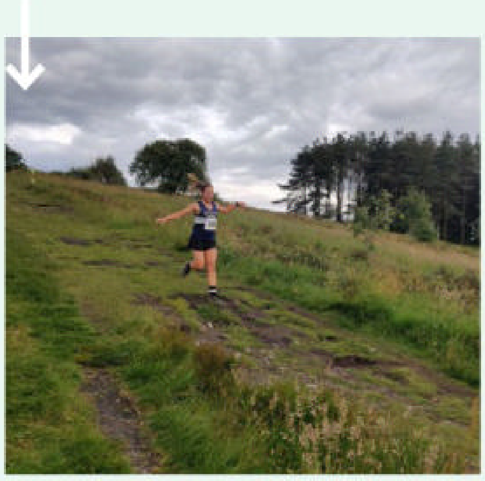
runjersey.co.uk

Eddie's Revenge Fell Race

Shaw, Lancashire, 28 June

This event is a self-described lung-buster, and with around 320m of ascent in just 6.1km of running, we're not inclined to disagree. As you might expect, there are uphill slopes so steep that you'll swear at least once while slogging up them, and downhills so thunderously careening that you'll wonder whether you'll ever be able to slow down. (Spoiler: you will. There's probably another uphill soon.)

middletonharriers.jimdo.com



Hull Half Marathon & 10K

Hull, Yorkshire, 11 June

Planning a route for an urban half marathon isn't an easy job. Too many twists and turns through narrow streets can be disorienting and runners can't really get into a rhythm; too many long straight sections through nondescript areas and your event has no sense of place. This half marathon manages to strike a good balance with half of the route winding through the city centre and half of it heading north towards the university with a couple of nice long straight sections.

runforall.com

Potters 'Arf Marathon 2023

Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, 11 June

Here's a brilliant event to increase running participation. You can do the half marathon all by yourself, or you can do it as part of a two- or four-person relay. Still not convinced? Then take the option to walk the half marathon, with an earlier start time so that you'll be finishing around the same time as the runners.

stoke.gov.uk

RW POLL

How do you usually get to your races?

56%

I drive alone

21%

I carpool

6%

I either walk, run or cycle

17%

I take public transport

Based on a Twitter poll with 367 votes

RW ONLINE RACE LISTINGS

Thirsty for more? Go to runnersworld.com/uk and click 'Events' for our comprehensive race database, powered by our events partner Find A Race, where you can search hundreds of races by location, terrain, distance and more.

The Vogum

Porthcawl, Glamorgan, 3 June

There's no time cut-off on this 40-miler along the Wales Coast Path, but that certainly shouldn't trigger any complacency in anyone who decides to take it on. The highest elevation along the route is only 70m, but with the constant ups and downs, you'll end up with some 1,000m of elevation in your legs by the time you reach the finish in Penarth, just south of Cardiff.

pegasusultrarunning.com

Sri Chinmoy Midsummer 10K

London, 3 June

The Sri Chinmoy Marathon Team puts on races from two miles to 3,100 miles (not a typo – three thousand one hundred!), as well as a selection of time-based events from six to 24 hours. This event in London's Battersea Park falls nicely between those extremes: a looped 10K with a great mix of very fast runners and people out to enjoy one of London's best parks.

srichinmoyraces.org

Skye Half Marathon

Portree, Inverness-shire, 10 June

You wanted a road race with a couple of inclines but not too many, but still with utterly gorgeous scenery? Usually that would be a little bit too much to ask, but then there's this half marathon on the Isle of Skye. Portree is the start and finish for the route that loops out into the rugged Skye countryside. The organisers promise that the legendary post-event cèilidh will be even bigger and better now that all the Covid restrictions are in the past.

skyehalfmarathon.com

Fairford 10K

Fairford, Gloucestershire, 11 June

This race encapsulates the very best of running in the United Kingdom. There aren't many places in the world that have events like this, small and competently run races organised by and taking place in a local community, where people line the country roads to shout encouragement (and, in hot conditions, offer a very welcome garden hose). A hidden gem.

runningsomewhereelse.com

WORDS: STEPHEN GLENNON

www.runningcrazy.co.uk

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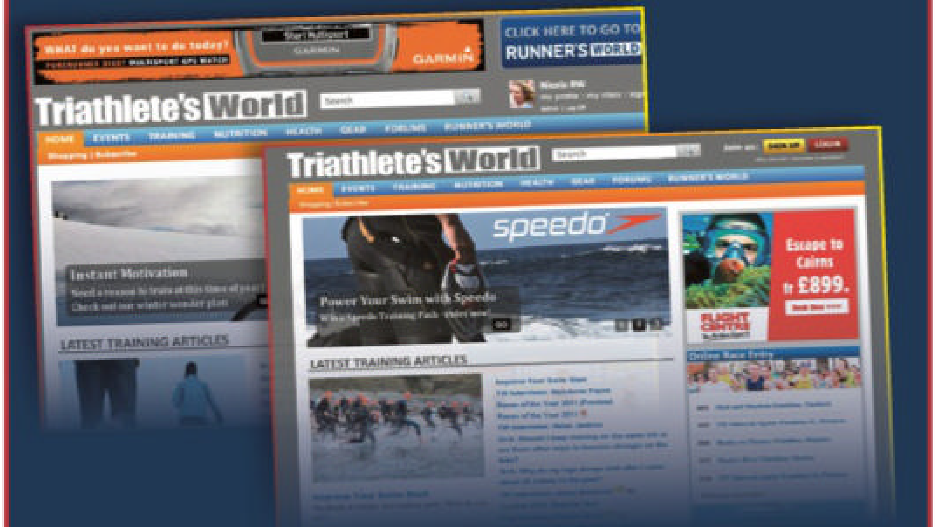
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Don't let joint discomfort keep you down

Try **TURMERIC+**

Regular physical activity is one of the best ways to reduce stress and anxiety and raise self-esteem. This was certainly the case for Richard Hamilton, 56, BBC World Service broadcaster and author.

Staying active and enjoying the outdoors has always been important to Richard, but a discomfort in his foot was holding him back and it started to affect his mood.

'I've always liked to exercise but I was unable to do the things I enjoyed, like cycling and running,' he says. 'I found it a little depressing and felt quite down in the dumps.'

'Then I noticed an advertisement for Turmeric+ and liked the science behind it.'

Turmeric+ was developed by FutureYou Cambridge. The company works with some of the world's leading experts in science and nutrition, and is renowned for developing high-quality health supplements backed by scientific research.

While developing Turmeric+, they set out to overcome the problem with turmeric's key active ingredient, curcumin: it's difficult for our bodies to absorb. Some turmeric products offer very high levels of curcumin, but unless it's made 'bioavailable', they make little difference.

So the scientists at FutureYou Cambridge used a patented curcuma phospholipid complex formulation to increase absorption by 30 times.

"I'm so **pleased** and would recommend it to anyone."

It's also been officially recognised and certified by Informed-Sport.

This is combined with vitamins C and D which contribute to normal function of cartilage and normal muscle function.*

'After about a month, I tried running again and it felt just like it used to. It's fantastic. I take one a day and I'm enjoying running and cycling again. I'm so pleased and would recommend it to anyone.'

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FutureYou Cambridge is offering you the opportunity to try its bestselling joint supplement, Turmeric+, for free, for 28 days.*

The Cambridge-based company is renowned for developing the highest quality health supplements backed by leading scientific research and actively work with highly-regarded scientific and nutritional experts.

Turmeric+ contains the most scientifically documented bioavailable curcumin formulation in existence, having been the focus of 45 human studies involving over 2,000 subjects.

Studies show the unique phytosome delivery system significantly increases curcumin absorption by 30 times; offering an advanced natural alternative to black pepper.

The vegan-friendly formula contains the full bouquet of curcuminoids including high levels of demethoxycurcumin (DMC), the most powerful curcuminoid.

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'We offer people their first pack of Turmeric+ for free so they can experience Turmeric+ for themselves. Most will know if it's working for them within four to eight weeks – and if they like it, they will stick with it.'

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Education

As a runner, you know that that regular exercise boosts brain health, and a fit brain is generally able to learn, think and remember better. If you are a parent, you would be likely to recommend that your children follow that example in an exercise activity of their choice.

However, during GCSE and A Level exam season, many students abandon regular exercise or choose other ways of unwinding from revision. For those with children of exam age who want to maintain their exercise routine, the most common question is whether it’s better to exercise before or after studying.

Here’s a quick summary of research on why and when students should incorporate exercise into their revision schedule.

Timing of Exercise

Although many individuals will have their own personal preferences on when to exercise, recent research provides some interesting insights as to the impact of exercise timing and recall.

The key finding was that timing a workout for a few hours after a study session is likely to result in better retention of the information just learnt. Whilst not yet fully understood, exercise seems to increase the production of biochemical in the body and brain related to mental function.

Experts think the crucial component is physical response. Exercise energises the body in much the same way an emotional experience does – emotional memories are well known to be the longest lasting. The researchers caution, however, that at most exercise can have a supportive effect – the important thing is to study well first.

Build Revision Concentration

In addition to the benefits for mental function, developing a good exercise routine helps build stronger “will-power”, helping students to return to their studies at times when they are tired or concentration is failing. For example, you probably know from experience that students find it really difficult to do homework or study after a school exam/test. Instead, they want to unwind as their will-power and energy has been depleted by the exam. Exercising helps by building endurance and stamina as well as boosting energy levels.

Exam Stress Levels

Exercise also helps with stress/anxiety and makes you happier.

When you do a physically-demanding endurance exercise (running/swimming-yes, weightlifting-no), a large amount of endorphins are released by your pituitary gland. These block sensations of pain and produce feelings of euphoria, making you feel happier and more relaxed. In terms of the type of exercise, it doesn’t have to be high intensity; research has shown that it’s regular exercise that matters and that more gentle activities, such as yoga or a brisk walk, can also be beneficial.

As GCSE and A Level revision and exam experts, we know that students benefit from regular exercise, both academically and emotionally. Hopefully, you are now better placed to explain those benefits to your son or daughter and can encourage them to incorporate exercise into their daily or weekly study routine.

I'M A RUNNER

PETER JAMES

THE BESTSELLING AUTHOR, 74, ON START LINE SELFIES AND INSPIRATION ON THE RUN

I WAS A KEEN RUNNER at school, a sprinter. I broke the British under-16 100-yard record in practice – to my amazement. Then I discovered girls and fags and stopped. The only sport I did was skiing and the occasional game of football. Apart from that I did no exercise at all until I was 33.

BEFORE I WAS MAKING A LIVING as a writer, I was working for the family business and I was kind of overweight. This was in the mid-80s. I was waking up in the middle of the night with pins and needles in my fingers – I think it was tension. I caught an interview on *Panorama* with Sir Michael Edwardes, the chief exec of British Leyland. They were in the throes of a big union dispute with this guy called Red Robbo [trade union leader Derek 'Red Robbo' Robinson]. The interviewer said to Edwardes: 'Every day you're driving to the Longbridge plant and there are 50,000 people jeering you, but you're so relaxed. What's your secret?' He said: 'I play squash four times a week. When you're fit, you can cope with anything life throws at you.'

I WENT RUNNING the next day. I managed about 100 yards. By the end of the week I was doing a mile. The pins and needles in my hands and the tension went. And I've pretty much run every day since for the past 40 years.

I WAS DIAGNOSED as type 2 diabetic 20 years ago, and exercise is the best way of managing that. So that's a massive incentive to stay fit. But I love the buzz I get from running. It's wonderful thinking time, and I get real inspiration.

I HAVE A COACH, so three days a week I do his programme. A typical week might be six miles progression on Wednesday, speedwork on Friday, then eight miles on Sunday. I might do a parkrun on Saturday. I usually have one rest day a week. We've got quite a lot of animals and two very active dogs. It's about an hour and a half to walk the dogs and feed the menagerie. So that's my exercise on a rest day.

> 'Since I started running in the mid-80s, I've pretty much run every day'

I WAS BORN AND RAISED in Brighton, and love running along the seafront. My detective character Roy Grace is a keen runner, like myself, and he also runs along the front. Even on a crap day it feels great... apart from when the wind always seems to be blowing in your face whichever way you run.

BEFORE I MET MY WIFE Lara, I wasn't into racing. But Lara has done about 22 marathons; she did Valencia last year in 3:19. She got my enthusiasm going, then I tried shorter races like 5Ks, parkruns and 10Ks.

● Peter James' latest Roy Grace novel, *Picture You Dead*, is out in paperback on 11 May. His play *Wish You Were Dead* is touring nationwide until July. See peterjames.com/plays/wish-you-were-dead for dates

MY MOST MEMORABLE RACE was a parkrun in Worthing at the beginning of December. Lara was pacing me because I was aiming for a PB. I was standing on the start line and a minute before we were due to go I was tapped on the shoulder and a woman says, 'Sorry to bother you, Mr James, but could I have a selfie?' So we managed to do the selfie just before they said 'go'!

RUNNING FIRES MY BRAIN UP. I always take my phone with me during the run so if I get any thoughts I can write them down. I've had people say to me, 'You ran past me, you were talking on your phone.' But I was actually mouthing lines from my play *Wish You Were Dead*, as sometimes I act out scenes when I'm running.

I WROTE A NOVEL three years ago called *I Follow You*. It was inspired by something that happened to my wife. We were living in the countryside north of Brighton, and she was running down a lane as it was getting dark. A male runner ran the other way and she waved just to say hi. A day later she noticed this guy had started following her on Strava. She was running down fairly remote woodland tracks, and she saw this guy was taking exactly the same tracks a couple of minutes after. So she quickly turned her Strava private.

BUT I LOVE STRAVA. There are tons of people I know on it and it does egg you on. I've become friends with a retired doctor, he's a couple of years older than me, and he's bloody fast! I keep thinking, 'I'm after him.'

WORDS: ANDY DIXON. ILLUSTRATION: PADDY MILLS. PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID NEWTON; GETTY IMAGES

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